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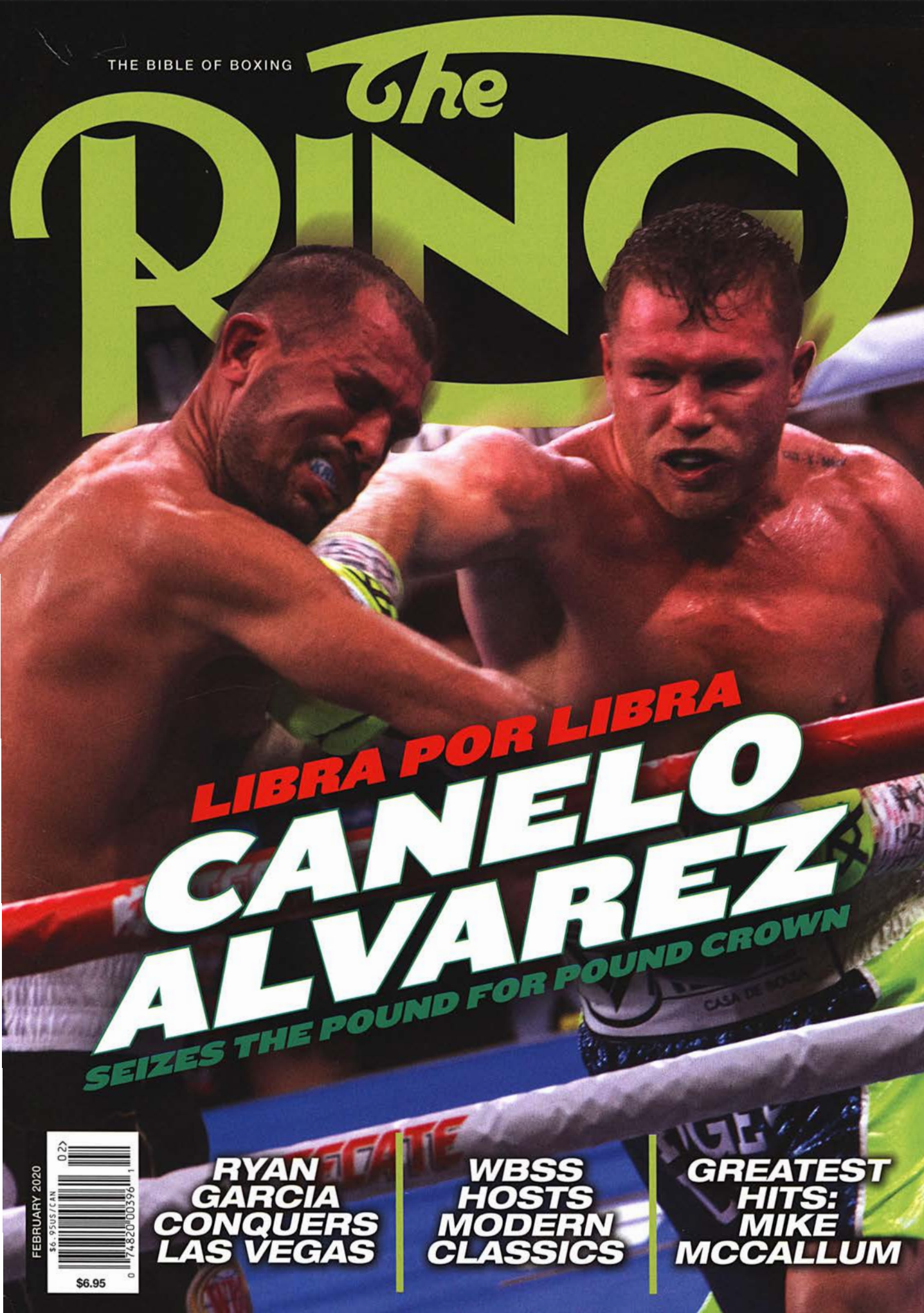

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Devin Haney made the first defense of his newly minted WBC lightweight title on the undercard of the KSI-Logan Paul rematch in Los Angeles. The YouTube stars put on a more entertaining fight, but Haney got the job done by shutting out unbeaten Alfredo Santiago.

PHOTO BY JAYNE KAMIN-ONCEA

Former undisputed cruiserweight champ Aleksandr Usyk is now fighting with the big boys.

PLEASE CLARIFY

Can you tell me what you mean by the "glamour division?" Alexander Usyk was listed as the champion for your cruiserweight division during your December 2019 issue; now I am reading the January 2020 issue of Ring Magazine and Usyk is not listed as a cruiserweight, and your ratings summary article tells me he has moved to the glamour division.

Frank Crouch

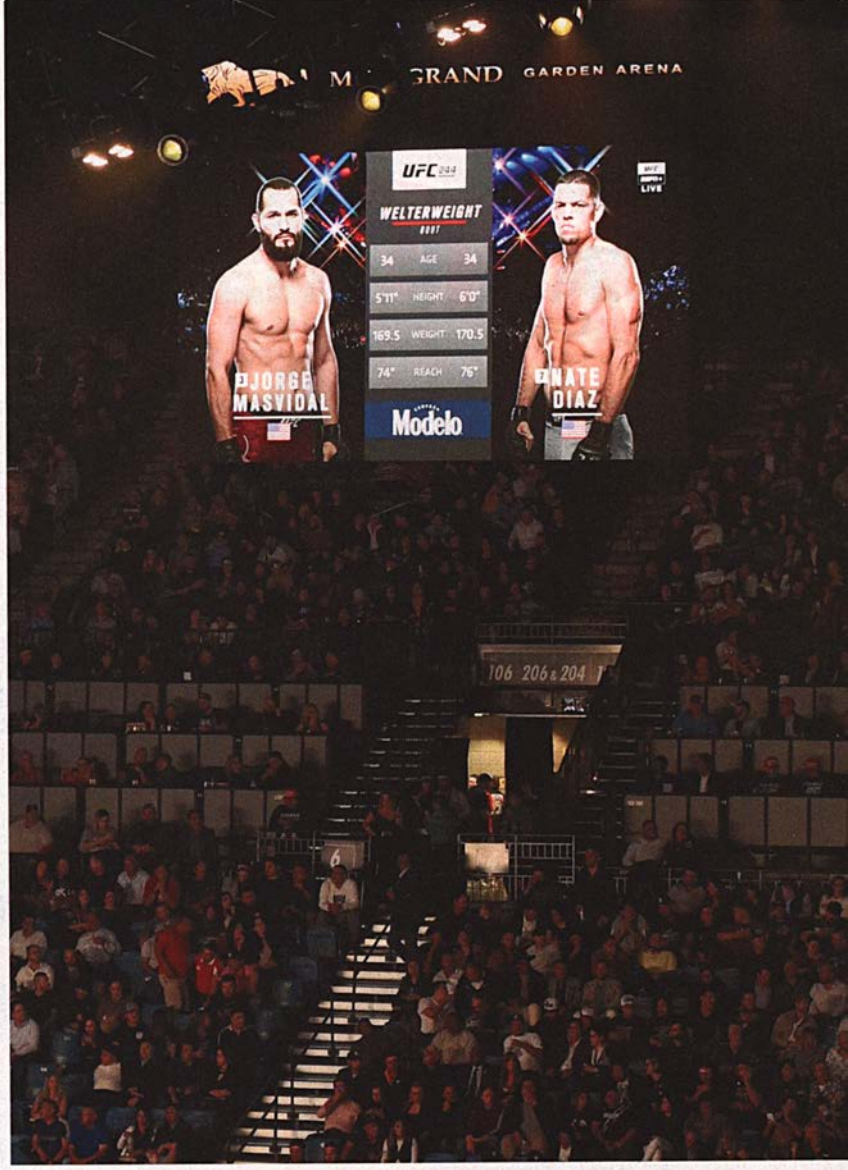
EDITOR'S RESPONSE: It's good that you ask, because it's an expression that people use in different ways. Some use "glamour divisions" as plural to mean the welterweight, middleweight and heavyweight weight classes, the most popular in the U.S. going back to the 1920s. Others use it as singular but change it according to which division seems to be getting the most attention (when Pacquiao and Mayweather were at their peaks, for example, welterweight was sometimes referred to as the glamour division). The most common practice today – and the way we use it – is that "glamour division" refers exclusively to the heavyweight division, because it has traditionally been the one that defines boxing in the public's imagination. Usyk was removed as the cruiserweight champion because he vacated all of his titles to campaign at heavyweight. He remains in the pound-for-pound list due to his accomplishments below 200 pounds but hasn't yet proved himself enough to be rated among the big boys, so, for the time being, the mythical list is the only place you'll see him (though we expect that to change).

WHAT ARE WE WAITING FOR?

While catching the Canelo-Kovalev in a movie theatre, I was bewildered by DAZN's pathetic presentation of an event with important historical significance and one of the year's biggest matches of 2019. Forcing the fans and fighters to endure a delay of more than 100 minutes because of a simultaneous commitment to an MMA event was unprofessional and inexcusable. Having to watch Canelo and Kovalev lounging in their dressing room for two hours was truly bizarre. What? No filler fights to at least pacify the bored audience. Instead, we had to listen to non-experts dissect the long-delayed fight ad nauseum. What it showed was DAZN's lack of dedication to a sport I've loved an entire lifetime.

Long gone is the specialized and highly professional treatment that networks like HBO provided for many years. Jim Lampley and Larry Merchant must be rolling their eyes, as they delivered their coverage of the sweet science with unmatched professionalism and respect. DAZN doesn't even come close.

Daniel McKrell
Parma, Ohio



DAZN delayed the start of Canelo-Kovalev for about 90 minutes while Jorge Masvidal vs. Nate Diaz played out at UFC 244.

THE SONNY SIDE

I finally got around to watching Showtime's Pariah, about Sonny Liston. I remember watching Liston very well. In addition to being a devastating puncher, he had a great deal of skill, and of course incredibly long arms. He was as much fun in his day as Tyson was in his prime.

There were a couple of things about the Showtime program that bugged me. One was their continuing suggestion that Liston might have thrown the rematch with Ali, an idea that belongs in the trash. If Liston had intended to throw the fight, why would he have gone down halfway through the first round? That would automatically have raised suspicions, as it did.

In the footage Showtime used, it was easy enough to see the "phantom punch" that floored Liston. It was thrown from a very odd angle and obviously Liston didn't see it coming. It didn't look like enough to knock Liston out, though, and it wasn't. Liston was knocked down, but he got up and tried to continue the fight.

Poor Jersey Joe Walcott was an inexperienced referee and he lost control of the fight at that point – and here, your founder, Nat Fleisher, becomes the villain of the situation. Fleisher yelled at Walcott that Liston hadn't beaten the count, so Walcott stopped the fight. But Fleisher was wrong. A fighter knocked down is not obligated to get up in exactly 10 seconds to continue the fight. (This was the same bullshit argument Don King tried to use after Tyson knocked Buster Douglas down.) All the downed fighter needs to do is beat the referee's count of 10. How the hell could the fighter know that exactly 10 seconds have passed? All he can do is follow the referee's count.

The only post-Ali fights Showtime gave us were Leotis Martin's knockout of Liston and the ugly Chuck Wepner fight. They completely ignored the 14 straight fights Liston won between Ali and Martin. He took a year off after Ali but then did his best to stay in the game. He was one of the greats.

Leslie Gerber
Woodstock, N.Y.

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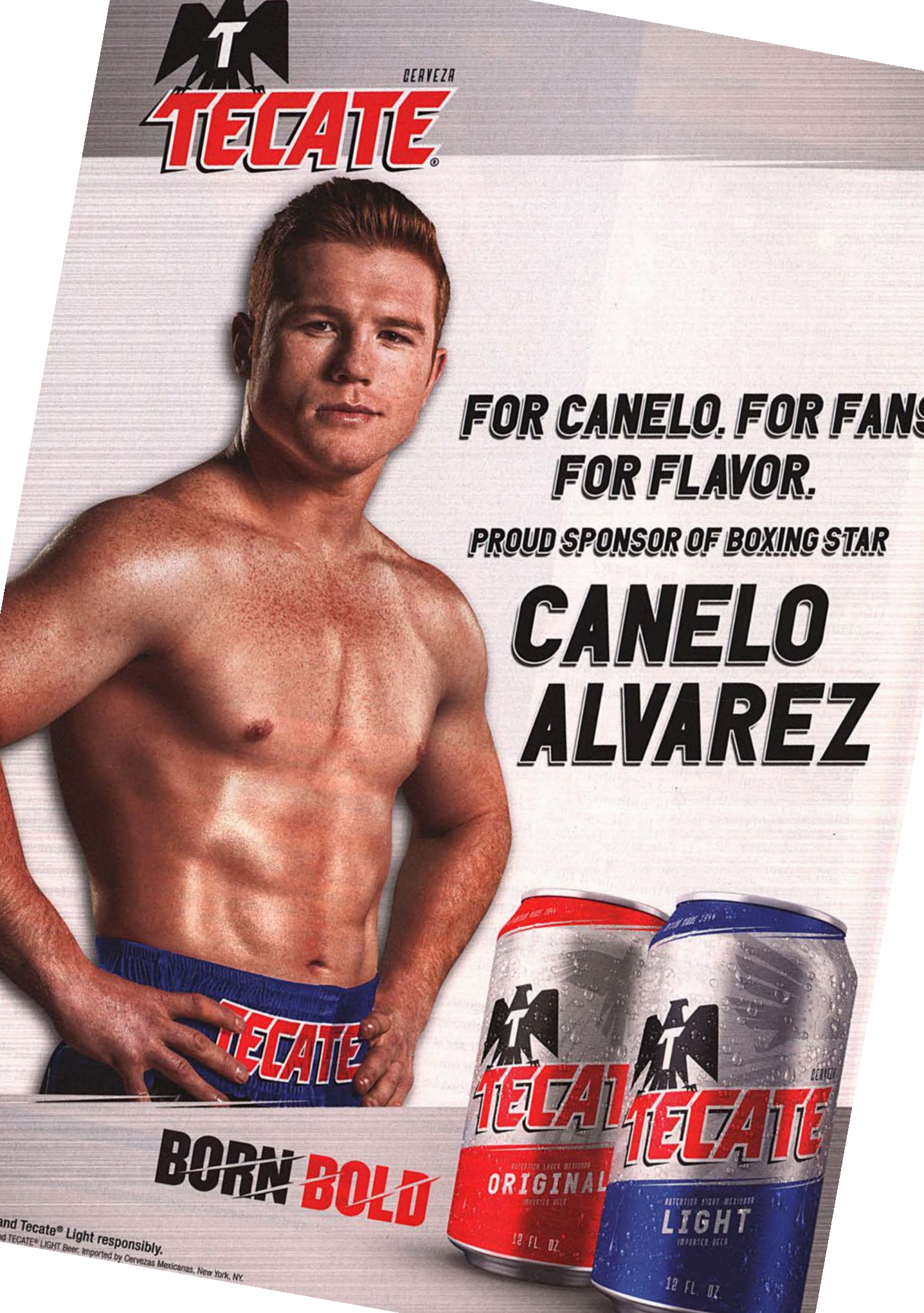
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RINGSIDE BY DOUG FISCHER

HOW TO PROPERLY HATE ON CANELO

Deontay Wilder scored a one-punch KO against Luis Ortiz on November 23 and half of Boxing Twitter declared him to be the greatest puncher in history and one of the best heavyweight champions of all time.

Inside the same MGM Grand Garden Arena in Las Vegas on November 2, Canelo Alvarez became the first reigning middleweight champ to earn a major light heavyweight world title by knocking out Sergey Kovalev, but many of the fans that would be caught up in Bronze Bomber Mania three weeks later downplayed the accomplishment. Some questioned if it had any merit at all.

Kovalev was an "old" 36, faded and weight-drained, they said.

Alvarez was a 3-to-1 favorite, they

VALERY SHARIFULIN

Those refusing to acknowledge Alvarez's KO of Sergey Kovalev will probably never give him credit for any victory.

added; he did what he was supposed to do. Don't elevate him in the pound-for-pound rankings and don't dare put him in the same sentence as Julio Cesar Chavez, they demanded.

I understand their rationale and resistance to the promotional hyperbole that preceded and followed the fight. But if Alvarez gets no credit for doing what everyone thought he would do against an "old" opponent, why did so many of his critics go gaga when Wilder, a 6-to-1 favorite, iced the 40-year-old Ortiz? Didn't he do what he was supposed to do, which was score another KO of the only legit heavyweight contender he's faced during his five-year title reign, apart from Tyson Fury?

The answer is simple: Canelo Alvarez is the biggest star in boxing. Wilder is not. And there will always be a loud contingent of harsh critics of whoever is the most popular boxer in the sport, especially if he's one of the richest athletes on the planet.

However, there's legitimate criticism and there's hate. Legit criticism is not recognizing Alvarez as a four-division titleholder by discounting the secondary WBA super middleweight belt he won by blasting overmatched Rocky Fielding a year ago. Hate is claiming that Kovalev was not only "shot," but also took a dive against Alvarez.

The rest of this column is dedicated to those who had the ignorance or gall to say that. I know you will NEVER give Alvarez props for ANYTHING he does in the ring. And it's OK.

Heavy is the head that wears the crown, and the diadems of boxing's kings, going all the way back to Jack Johnson, are usually weighed down with a lot of hate. Hate is part of boxing. If you're a Canelo hater, embrace it!

Over the past 20 years, I've been accused of being a "hater" of the following stars: Mike Tyson, Roy Jones Jr., Oscar De La Hoya and Floyd Mayweather Jr.

If that's true (and I don't think it is, but that's a topic for another column), I've got seniority on a lot of you. So, allow me to give you young haters some advice: If you want to pooh-pooh a star's opponents, don't stoop to conspiracy theories after he kicks their asses; discredit them BEFORE the fight.

Alvarez is "the man" in three divisions – middleweight, super middleweight and light heavyweight – and significant challenges await him in each weight class: Pound-for-pound players Gennadiy Golovkin and Artur Beterbiev, Ring Magazine 168-pound champ Callum Smith, talented stick-and-movers Billy Joe Saunders, Dmitry Bivol and Demetrius Andrade, and brash boxer-punchers such as David Benavidez and Jermall Charlo.

It would kill you to give him any credit for facing any of these titleholders, wouldn't it? So, let's crap on them now rather than later.

For starters, claim that any light heavyweight or middleweight that fights Canelo at super middleweight was weight compromised. (In fact, start referring to the 168-pound division as "Caneloweight" whenever he fights there.)

Also, consider anyone in his 30s as "old" (and no, it doesn't matter if they turned pro in their mid-20s). So, refer to Beterbiev, who turns 35 in January, as an "aging veteran" if he shares the ring with Alvarez in 2020. (Never mind that Beterbiev only has 15 pro bouts. Use that fact against Alvarez! Beterbiev was old AND inexperienced!)

Claim that Golovkin, who will be 38 in April 2020, is ANCIENT. Alvarez gets zero credit for beating his chief rival if and when they meet for a third time.

You can't say that Benavidez and Bivol are old, but you can claim that Benavidez, who turned 23 in December, is a baby. You can also say the Arizona native looked like a work-in-progress against Anthony Dirrell. Bivol, who turned 29 in December, is past the developmental stage, but with only 17 pro bouts under his belt, you can feel comfortable saying he's too green for a guy with 56 fights. (While you're at it, point out how boring Bivol looked in this last four bouts, which went the distance. Tell everyone that he wasn't able to transition from the amateur boxing style to the professional style.)

Speaking of boring, you must refuse to give Canelo any credit if he faces perennial stinkers Saunders and Andrade. Yes, they've got tricky southpaw styles that confound most boxers, and they can probably frustrate Alvarez, but you know they can't hurt him and it's unlikely that they can outpoint him. So, start talking and Tweeting about the deck being stacked against them the moment the fight is signed. If they legitimately win 2-3 rounds, call the fight a draw. If they can win 4-5 rounds, be sure to scream "robbery" when they lose.

Smith and Charlo are action fighters in their primes, but the 29-year-old Englishman looked awful defending his Ring and WBA titles against John Ryder. Alvarez can not be praised for beating a champ who needed a gift decision to retain his titles. As for the 29-year-old Houston native, just claim that Canelo ran from him for the past two years and that 'Mall got "stale" waiting for him.

That's proper hate that should cover the next three years of Alvarez accomplishments. And who knows? You could get lucky and he could lose during that time.

ROUND 1

FIGHTER OF THE MONTH ★ NEW FACES +

FIGHTER OF THE MONTH

NAOYA INOUE

If you wondered if Naoya Inoue could deal with adversity and an opponent he could not overpower, Nonito Donaire helped answer those questions.

Japanese star Naoya Inoue entered the final of the World Boxing Super Series as a three-weight world titleholder, a pound-for-pound entrant and arguably the best puncher in boxing. However, "The Monster" had never come face to face with a great fighter – someone willing to soak up the fierce punishment he's capable of dishing out and firing back. He has now. The prevailing wisdom entering his November 7 bantamweight unification clash with Nonito Donaire at the Super Arena in Saitama, Japan, was that everything favored Inoue. He was unbeaten, fighting at home and, at 26, 10 years younger than "The Filipino Flash." Inoue had also demolished his previous four opponents in less than three rounds and was in terrifying form. Donaire was considered ancient for a 118-pound fighter, and some experts had even voiced concern for the future Hall of Famer's well-being. They should have known better. Despite having had 18 world title bouts over the course of two decades, Donaire is well-preserved, wonderfully skilled and, more importantly, he was not intimidated. Inoue, as always, came out aggressively, but things were different quickly. The Japanese destroyer was landing his best bombs, but – unlike Inoue's previous 18 victims – Donaire stood up to him. That was the first surprise, but when a jolting left hook stunned Inoue and cut him over his right eye in Round 2, there was the overwhelming feeling that we were in for something very special. What we got was a modern classic. Inoue fought brilliantly, but he was hurt badly in this fight and was forced to dig deep for victory. The home fighter scored a body-shot knockdown in the 11th, but just when he was on the verge of securing a stoppage, Donaire rose from the ashes once more and landed a thunderbolt left hook to the jaw. The result was a 12-round unanimous decision for Inoue, who now reigns supreme as the Ring, IBF and WBA titleholder, as well as the Ali Trophy winner. It's cliché, but a champion proves his worth by overcoming adversity, and Inoue passed his test with flying colors. It will never be forgotten.

Lee says his physical development has caught up with his elite gym experience and he's ready for a breakout 2020.

NEW FACES

BRANDUN LEE

By Anson Wainwright

Junior welterweight prospect Brandun Lee has been a dominant force in the embryonic stage of his career. Over the past three years, the 20-year-old Californian has gone about his work quietly but says a breakout is near.

"I'm in a terrific place," Lee (17-0, 15 knockouts) told The Ring. "My man-strength is coming soon. My team has done a wonderful job building me up. 2020 is going to be my year."

Lee went under the radar until he made his TV debut in September, stopping Milton Aruaz in two rounds on a ShoBox card in Texas. The performance caught the eye of former Ring editor-in-chief Steve Farhood, who now serves as an on-air analyst for the Showtime program.

"I was skeptical about Brandun Lee when I first researched him, because his record suggested that he had faced a very low level of opposition," Farhood said. "But having now seen him twice live, I've become a believer. He certainly has natural power, and I think the KOs will mount as he fights tougher opponents.

"How he'll handle adversity remains to be seen, but I could say that about a ton of prospects. And for a young fighter, he's already well aware of his cross-cultural appeal. He realizes how big a star he can become."

Lee was born into a boxing family, with his grandfather a trainer to two uncles who boxed at a high level on the amateur scene in the 1970s and '80s. His father, who was born in South Korea and later moved to California, built a gym in which young Brandun spent a lot of time watching his older brother train. Lee entered his first tournament when he was 8, and by the time he was 13, he was struggling to find opponents.

"We used to go out on the weekend to fight, and in Northern California boxing wasn't as popular," he explained. "There was only one or two shows on a Saturday. It took me about a month to clear out Northern California, and nobody would want to fight me.

"Eventually we went to Central California, and the same thing there. It took me a little longer because it's bigger; it probably took me three months.

"Then we went to Southern California and that took a while. Southern California is the capital of boxing worldwide. Since I look Chinese, the Mexicans used to tell my father, saying, 'We'll fight the little Chinese kid.' I used that to my advantage so I could get a fight and learn and use my skills.

"After a year or two, eventually I wouldn't be able to get a fight. Then we headed out to Arizona and (for) so long (I) couldn't get a fight. Nevada, so long couldn't get a fight. Even went up to Washington and so long couldn't get a fight. After so long, there was only national tournaments."

Lee went an impressive 196-5 as an amateur, though he never fought in the open division. He won the Junior Golden Gloves on four occasions, the Junior Silver Gloves three times and the Junior PAL five times. He elected to sign a pro contract with well-respected talent-spotter Cameron Dunkin in the fall of 2016 and debuted shortly afterward at just 17 years old.

"In the senior divisions at the national tournaments, they weren't having headgear. So my father and I figured if we're gonna fight without headgear, I might as well turn pro and get paid for it."

Lee has learned his trade sparring a host of top fighters, including Tim Bradley, Mikey Garcia, Maurice Hooker, Mauricio Herrera, Felix Diaz, Vergil Ortiz, Devin Haney and Ryan Garcia. His father, Bobby, trains him and feels there is a long way to go in their father-son journey.

"He's real quick on learning things," said Bobby. "Don't get me wrong; he still has a lot to learn, and I have a lot to learn. We're learning every day. Overall he's doing pretty well. His strength is his straight punches and he has a great straight right hand – that's his punch."

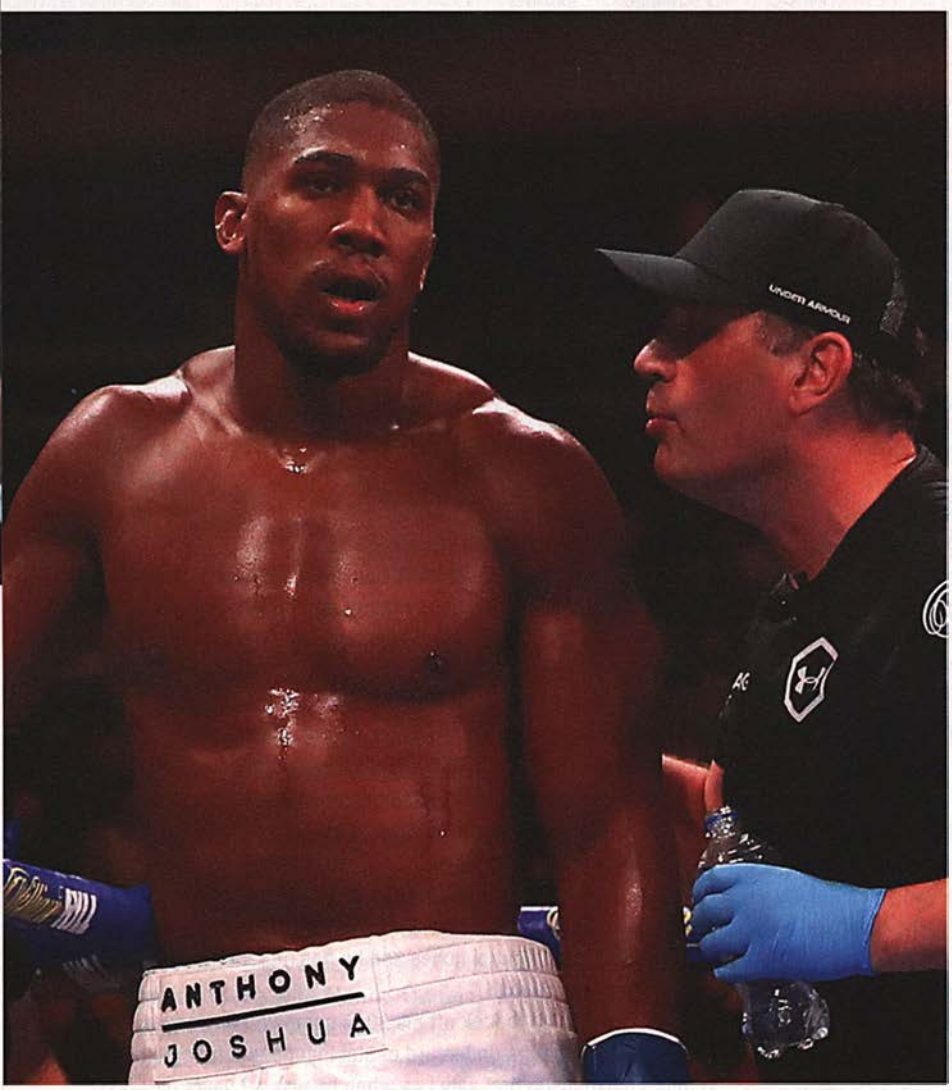
Lee is scheduled to kick off his 2020 campaign on January 10 in Atlantic City on the undercard of stablemate and friend Jaron Ennis. Dunkin, who first saw Lee when he was 13 years old, believes his young charge has huge potential, both as a fighter and at the gate.

"Brandun is a terrific fighter. He's coming into his own now. He's getting better with each fight," said the manager-turned-promoter. "I think Brandun will be one of the figureheads of our company, Now Boxing Promotions, in the coming years."

Questions and/or comments can be sent to Anson at elraincoat@live.co.uk and you can follow him on Twitter @AnsonWainwright.

JABS AND STRAIGHT WRITES

BY THOMAS HAUSER



FIGHTING WITH A CONCUSSION

Trainer Rob McCracken was widely criticized for remarks he made to the BBC during the early stages of promoting the December 7, 2019, rematch between Anthony Joshua and Andy Ruiz. Referencing the aftermath of Round 3 of their first fight, McCracken said, "I know (Joshua) better than all these experts who virtually don't know him or have met him once or twice. So I knew he was concussed and I'm trying to get him through a few more rounds, one round at a time, and see where he's at. Can he recover? Can he get back into this? But he was glazy-eyed from when he got caught with that initial shot in 3 and he carried that with him up until the end. It's a nightmare situation. Pro boxing is deadly, and you're in the corner with a heavyweight not responding as he should."

"How could McCracken let AJ fight with a concussion?" the critics responded. "That's horrible."

But boxers often continue fighting after being concussed during a fight. That's not a secret to those in the know or anyone with enough sense to understand what's going on.

A concussion is a temporary loss of normal brain function, most often caused by a blow to the head. Depending on its severity, a concussion can affect memory, judgment, reflexes, speech, balance and muscle coordination. Additional physical symptoms can include a prolonged headache, vision disturbances, dizziness, nausea, vomiting, ringing ears, sensitivity to light and a loss of smell or taste.

A person who suffers a concussion does not necessarily lose consciousness. A "mild"

Some fans were surprised to learn, following Robert McCracken's comments after Joshua-Ruiz I, that boxers often continue fighting after suffering concussions.

concussion might result in someone being dazed or "buzzed." A person who experiences a "moderate" concussion might lose consciousness for a second. A "severe" concussion can involve a longer period of unconsciousness. The severity and duration of other symptoms are also factored into evaluating the seriousness of a concussion.

No two concussions are exactly alike. And there are no scientifically validated treatments for concussions other than a few medications that are used to treat the symptoms of a concussion, not the concussion injury itself.

Let's look at what the long-term aftereffects of a severe concussion can be.

The injured person might look healthy. But dizziness and blurred or double vision can last for a year or longer. He or she might have trouble sequencing (for example, remembering the order in which to perform three simple chores). Constant fatigue, anxiety and depression are common.

Clay Moyle (who has written biographies of Sam Langford, Billy Miske and Tony Zale) experienced the aftereffects of a severe concussion when he fell 10 feet from a ladder, hit his head on the root system of a tree and was unconscious for approximately nine minutes. Moyle's condition has improved steadily since then. But more than three years later, he still suffers from motor-skill issues and other symptoms. Recently, he told me, "There was absolutely nothing more frustrating to me than the fact that almost everyone thought I not only looked perfectly fine, but was, and that it was all in my head, so to speak. My sister essentially convinced my mother and siblings that my only problem was that I was suffering from anxiety. Hell, yes, I was suffering from anxiety, but it was because my brain didn't feel remotely the same and simply trying to function on a daily basis had become such a struggle for me."

If a player in the National Football League is knocked down and struggles to get to his feet because "his bell has been rung," he's removed from the game and evaluated in a concussion protocol tent before being allowed to return to the playing field. The examination explores physical and cognitive symptoms.

By contrast, if a fighter is knocked down and struggles to get to his feet, there's no concussion protocol tent to put him in where he can be examined for 10 minutes before a determination is made as to whether or not he's fit to continue fighting.

The referee has the authority to stop a fight. But insofar as neurological symptoms are concerned, it's primarily a call for the ring doctor.

We've all seen ring doctors shine a penlight into a fighter's eyes between rounds. But that's not about concussions. The doctor is looking to see if the fighter's pupils are the same size and if they're reacting differently from one another. If the pupils are not the same size or are reacting differently, that's often indicative of bleeding in the brain. The fighter should be taken to a hospital as soon as possible.

How does a doctor determine in the middle of a fight whether a fighter is suffering from concussive symptoms sufficient to warrant the fight being stopped?

It's an art as much as a science, a gray area with no simple answers. There are no clear guidelines for ring doctors to follow. Standards are still evolving. The steps taken vary from doctor to doctor and state to state.

Boxing is legalized assault. Conduct that would otherwise be unlawful is allowed in a boxing ring. The rules for medical care during a fight are also different from the norm. Continued participation that wouldn't be permitted elsewhere is allowed during a fight. A fighter who is "buzzed" is more likely than would otherwise be the case to suffer a second, more serious, loss of normal brain function during the fight. But he's often allowed to fight on.

Reality dictates that the magnitude of a fight and what has happened in the earlier stages of the fight are also weighed in the process.

Deontay Wilder was involved in two high-profile incidents. In Round 7 of his March 3, 2018, fight against Luis Ortiz, Ortiz stunned Wilder and followed with a barrage of punches that pummeled Deontay around the ring. Wilder appeared to be "out on his feet." But he stayed on them. From all appearances, he suffered a "mild" concussion from which he quickly recovered.

Nine months later, Wilder decked Tyson Fury in the final round of their championship fight. Fury lay on his back, seemingly only barely conscious. Then he rose to his feet just before the count of 10, a heroic effort that evoked images of a barely conscious Larry Holmes climbing off the canvas against Earnie Shavers and Renaldo Snipes. That, most likely, was a "moderate" concussion.

Neither Wilder fight would have been allowed to continue had it been a four-round preliminary bout. But given the attendant circumstances, each fight went on. Maybe things shouldn't be that way, but that's the way they are.

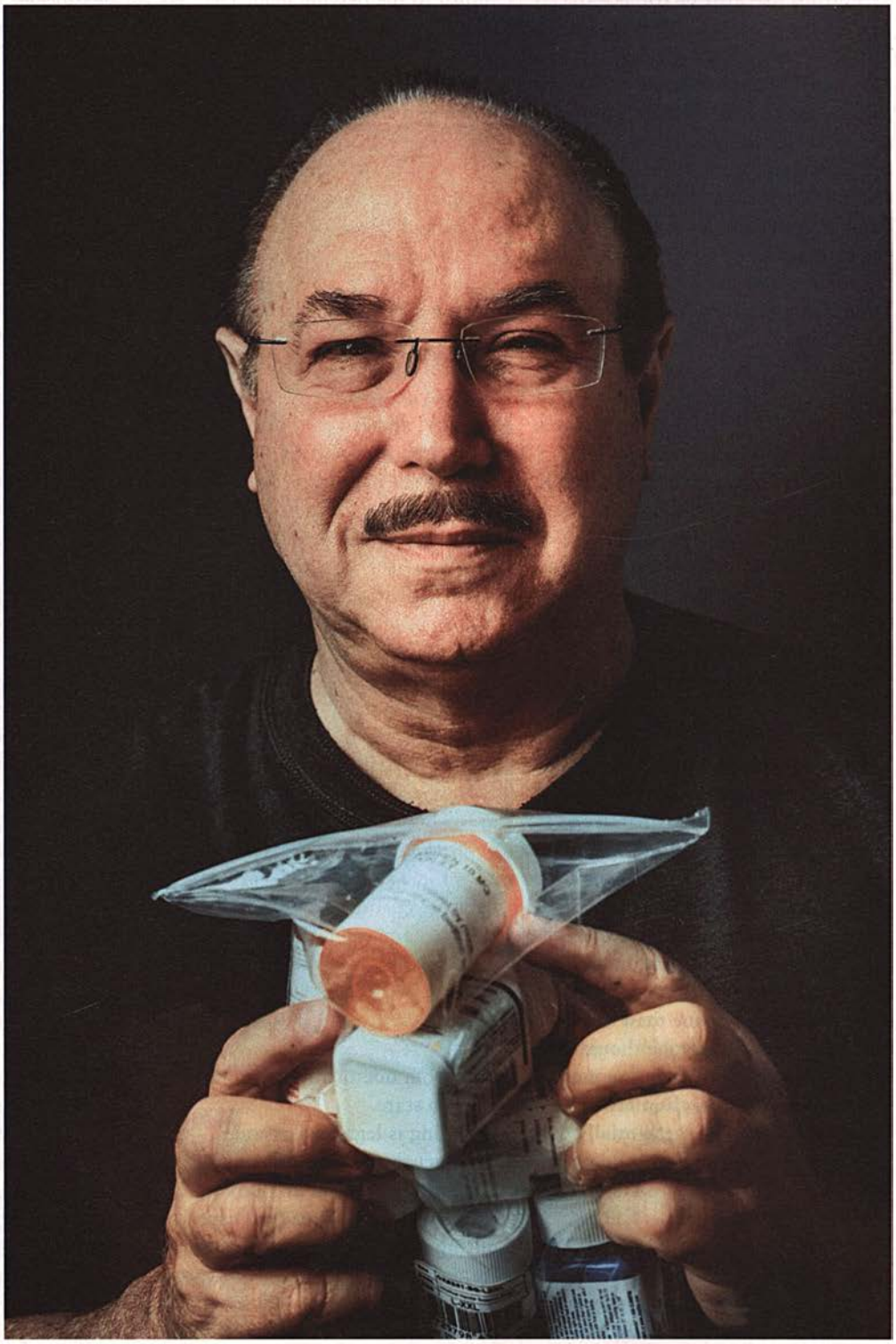
Let's be honest. If fights were stopped every time a boxer was dazed or buzzed, there would be no boxing.

Thomas Hauser's email address is thomashauserwriter@gmail.com. His most recent book – A Dangerous Journey: Another Year Inside Boxing – was published by the University of Arkansas Press. In 2004, the Boxing Writers Association of America honored Hauser with the Nat Fleischer Award for career excellence in boxing journalism.

VICTOR CONTE AND MARGARET GOODMAN: THE CRUSADERS

THE FACE OF BOXING

PHOTOGRAPHS BY **WOJTEK URBANEK**
TEXT BY **THOMAS HAUSER**



Victor Conte and Margaret Goodman have markedly different pasts.

Conte was the founder and president of BALCO and at the vortex of several well-publicized PED scandals. He spent four months in prison after pleading guilty to illegal steroid distribution and money laundering in 2005. Since then, he has become a forceful advocate for clean sport, education and reform. He now works with athletes as a conditioner and nutritionist at a cutting-edge facility in San Carlos, California, known as SNAC (an acronym for Scientific Nutrition for Advanced Conditioning). Conte is also a valuable asset for those who are trying to rid boxing of PEDs because of his knowledge of how the performance-enhancing drugs game is played and his willingness to share his knowledge.

Goodman is a neurologist with a private practice in

Las Vegas. She served for years as chief ringside physician and chair of the medical advisory board for the Nevada State Athletic Commission. Many of the reforms that she pushed for during her tenure are now accepted by the boxing community as essential to protecting the health and safety of fighters. More recently, Goodman founded and is the current CEO of the Voluntary Anti-Doping Association. VADA is recognized worldwide as the most effective and honest PED-testing entity in boxing.

Fighters know that Conte will get them into the best condition possible by honest means. And they know that Goodman will oversee comprehensive state-of-the-art drug testing to ensure a level playing field when VADA's services are retained.

"Victor and Margaret were two very different subjects," Wojtek Urbanek recalls. "With Victor, I photographed him in his hotel room. When I got there, he opened the door and shook my hand and right away made me feel welcome. He's very smart – a genius, really – and a great storyteller.

"I photographed Margaret at a boxing writers dinner in New York when she got an award for long and meritorious service to boxing. She sat down in front of the camera, and I felt like a painter when I looked through the lens at her blue eyes and red hair. She seemed fragile in some ways and very strong in others. What impressed me most was the respect that everyone at the dinner had for her. People there really appreciated what she is doing for boxing. It was a little like photographing royalty." RING

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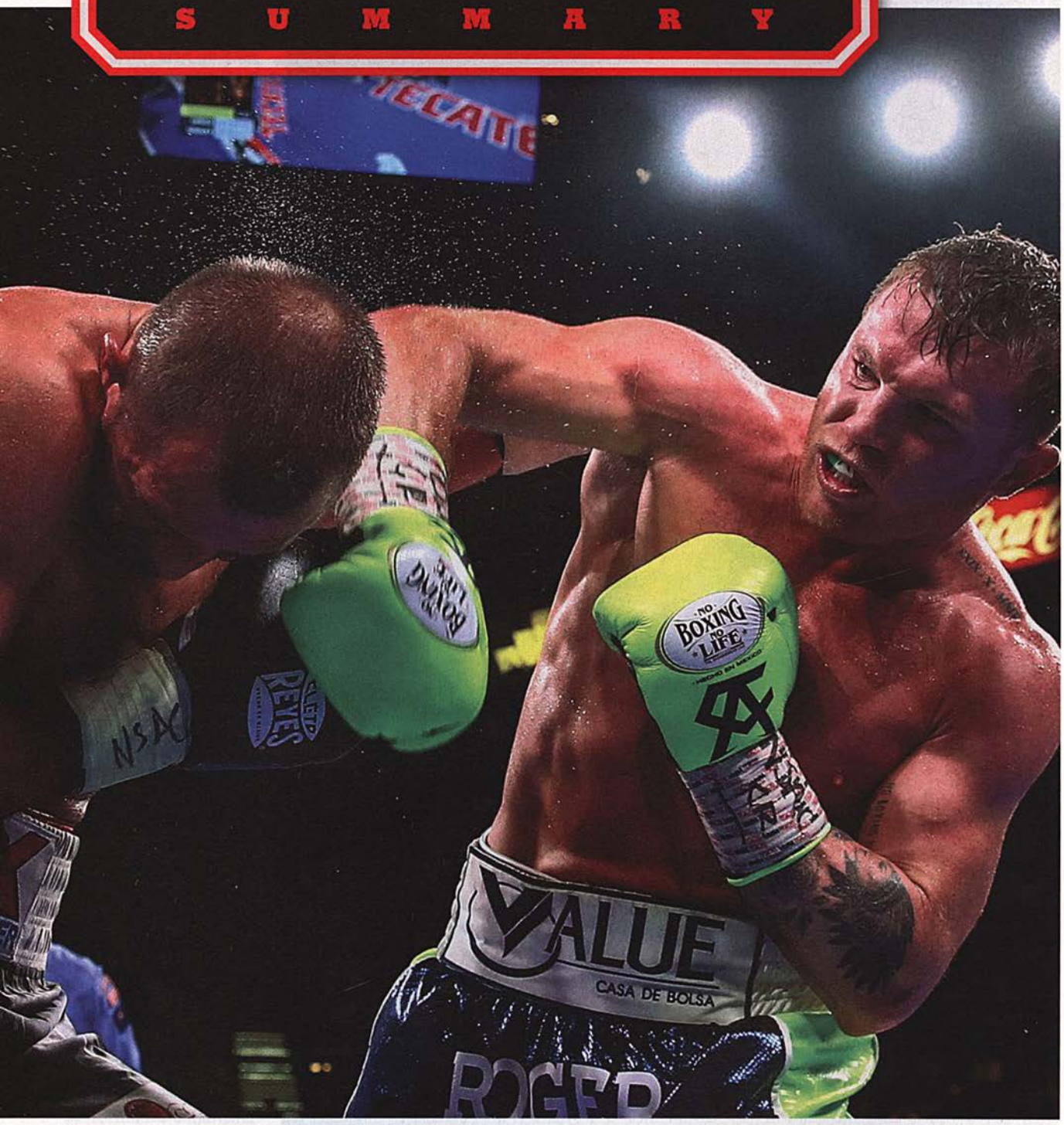
RATINGS SUMMARY

THE RING RATINGS THROUGH FIGHTS OF NOVEMBER 16, 2019



RECENT FIGHT RESULTS AND CHANGES IN THE RING'S DIVISIONAL RANKINGS

BY **BRIAN HARTY**

Canelo Alvarez punched his ticket to the No. 1 spot in the pound-for-pound ratings and a No. 2 light heavyweight ranking by KOing Sergey Kovalev.

POUND FOR POUND

It was an active month for the best of the best, with two P4P incumbents making moves and a third making a strong case for entry.

The outlier, Scottish junior welterweight Josh Taylor, went into the final of the World Boxing Super Series as the "yes, but" guy. There were no doubts about the purity of the threat he posed to anyone, that he was both marksman and woodsman with an in-ring work ethic second to none, but his virtues were usually eclipsed by all the speculative praise for his opponent, Regis Prograis, the lycanthrope from New Orleans, in whose improvisations one could see the growing signs of something approaching artistry. Taylor is really good, yes, but Prograis is special.

Prograis is special, yes. But Taylor was more so on October 26 in London, shutting down the American's game with a relentless outpouring of sharp jabs and hooks to the body, constantly staying in motion to frustrate the more leisurely approach of Prograis, who never quite found his groove despite some dominant moments made clear by the damage around Taylor's right eye. Prograis might've been expecting he'd eventually get a more fatigued Taylor to finish off, but the well of vitality seemed only to rise the more the Scotsman drew from it. A 12th-round surge from "Rougarou" was too late to earn the numbers needed, and Taylor was served with a wheelbarrow-load of prizes by majority decision: 117-112, 115-113 and 114-114.

In the hallowed virtual hall of the Ring Ratings Panel, the opening statement in the case for Taylor's pound-for-pound status went like this: "In 16 fights, Josh Taylor has won a world title, unified world titles, picked up the vacant Ring championship at 140 pounds and took the Muhammad Ali trophy. His last four opponents had a combined record of 94-1 (the only loss was Viktor Postol's to Terence Crawford) coming in. He has gone from strength to strength and just defeated a world champion who was probably in the 11-15 range pound-for-pound." As in the push to draft Artur Beterbiev (No. 9) last month, Manny Pacquiao (No. 10) figured into the argument, with the rallying cry of "new blood" going against the 40-year-old icon and those in favor of salvaging the grizzled P4P mascot again touting his win over Keith Thurman. Taylor's initial advocate claimed that as good as Thurman and Oleksandr Gvozdyk (Beterbiev's victim) were, neither of them was getting the same level of admiration as Prograis before losing. Some panelists agreed, others didn't. Some believed Taylor's win could rate somewhere in between Pacquiao's and Beterbiev's, and at least one took the opportunity to complain that Beterbiev never should've been included in the first place. Deontay Wilder's name was somehow mentioned.

The argument was veering into the heart of what makes the pound-for-pound game such a whirlpool: There can be no imaginary weightless rankings without real-world results to compare, but real-world results can't be compared in a weightless world without imagination. Whatever degree of subjectivity a person claims to have, it will always come down to quantifying which win is "better" than another, and that's just impossible when it comes to elite-level clashes between people fighting with wildly different styles dictated in large part by how many pounds of flesh they're throwing around. Is an ostrich that successfully kicks in one rival's ribcage after another in mating season better than a hummingbird that defends a clump of honeysuckle for an entire summer with weapons that could barely scratch a marshmallow?

With all Braveheart references exhausted and Pacquiao still entrenched as a sentimental favorite, Taylor didn't get the "aye" votes he needed and the panelists denied him a pound-for-pound berth. On the bright side, it's about the only thing he didn't come away with that night. And they'll never take his freedom.

The next fight to spark debate was Canelo Alvarez's 11th-round knockout of Sergey Kovalev on November 2. It was the Mexican's first fight as a light heavyweight, he took on the No. 2-rated guy – who not so unrecently had been a Top 5 pound-for-pounder – and he methodically broke him down until a hook behind the ear left

Josh Taylor accomplished a lot with his hard-fought decision over Regis Prograis in the WBSS 140-pound final, but it didn't land him a place in the P4P top 10.

Heavyweight contender Kubrat Pulev held onto the bottom spot in the rankings with a pedestrian 10-round decision over Rydell Booker.

the Russian neurologically vulnerable for a straight-right finisher, no count necessary.

Winning Kovalev's WBO belt made Canelo a three-division titleholder (four to those who count the secondary WBA 168-pound strap he won by knocking out Rocky Fielding), so the P4P discussion was practically mandatory, but he was already rated at No. 3 on the list. The question was whether he should rise above No. 2-rated Terence Crawford, No. 1-rated Vasiliy Lomachenko or both, if at all. All three scenarios had supporters, though moving Canelo to No. 1 had the early edge. The reasons in play were even more complex than with Taylor. There were the same kind of quality-of-win comparisons … One panelist in favor of Canelo as king made this comparison: "We moved Loma up based partly on the Linares win, and Kovalev is Canelo's Linares: a great fighter who still looks great in the ring but is ripe to be chopped down to size by the perfect candidate." Others saw Kovalev's decline as harmful to Canelo's case, saying that picking him was more an example of pound-for-pound skills in matchmaking. But the most common reasons for holding him back were: 1. Lingering grievances over the results of his two fights with Gennadiy Golovkin, and 2. His positive test for clenbuterol in 2018. It must also be acknowledged that with Canelo's connection to Golden Boy Promotions and Golden Boy's ownership of The Ring, there has always been an extra measure of caution in regard to this issue, even when journalists and organizations not connected to the magazine already had Canelo rated at No. 1.

Here's what it came down to: The race between Canelo, Crawford and Lomachenko – and Naoya Inoue, who would soon be making his own case – has reached a point where everybody watching has opinions about who is most qualified to be No. 1, but nobody feels strongly that any of the candidates are UNqualified. They all have stellar lists of accomplishments and the order could change every time one of them fights. With Canelo, the time had come. It went to a vote and it was close, but the redhead got the nod. He's the most recent guy to do something huge, so he's No. 1.

And then there was Inoue (No. 4 last month), who won his branch of the WBSS with a Fight of the Year candidate against Nonito Donaire, as detailed later in this issue. The debate wasn't as contentious, though two members of the panel firmly insisted that the unbeaten bantamweight champion (and previous titleholder in two other divisions) should already be No. 1. Ultimately he was promoted one notch over Crawford, whose career is in uncertain territory due to a promotional firewall between him and the other top welterweights.

HEAVYWEIGHTS

After his second consecutive appearance on U.S. soil, a unanimous decision over unrated Rydell Booker, Kubrat Pulev (No. 10) remains the most obscure member of the list to American (and possibly all) fans, and his chance to remedy that in a positive fashion doesn't look likely. He was the mandatory challenger to the IBF title held by Andy Ruiz Jr. at press time, but regardless of whether that's still the case when you read this, the Booker fight didn't suggest anything alluring about a matchup between the 38-year-old Bulgarian and either Ruiz or Anthony Joshua. That is, if whoever won the strap even decides to keep it.

CRUISERWEIGHTS

At 6-foot-5, British Olympian Lawrence Okolie (No. 8 last month) inflicted his size advantages on both Yves Ngabu and the people watching the jab-and-grab proceedings for nearly seven rounds, but it all ended on a high note with a cracking right cross to the Belgian's chin. Okolie ascended to No. 7 while Ngabu (No. 9 last month) dropped out of the ratings, which created a vacancy at No. 10 for Alexsei Papin, the former kickboxer whose last hands-only effort was a slim majority decision loss to Ilunga Makabu.

LIGHT HEAVYWEIGHTS

With this being Canelo's first fight at 175, the question was where to insert him after his victory over Kovalev, who fell from No. 2 to No. 5. The choices put forth were to give the Mexican the vacancy at No. 2 or

bring him in at No. 4 below Dmitry Bivol, with supporters for each idea pretty much split into the same camps as the pound-for-pound debate. As with that decision, the more conservative opinions were overruled – basically because Canelo beat the No. 2 guy and arguments against him taking that spot amounted to "Kovalev shouldn't have been No. 2." The man pushed out by the new No. 2 was Sullivan Barrera (No. 10 last month).

SUPER MIDDLEWEIGHTS

Billy Joe Saunders (No. 9 last month) sparkled only a few times for the first 10 rounds against Marcelo Coceres (unrated) – the Brit was his usual nimble self but a little off-point and seemingly uninspired by the competition – and the cards were barely split in his favor. In the 11th, the WBO titleholder suddenly woke up and put the Argentine challenger down hard three times before the ref made the mercy call. Saunders rose to No. 6 on the list and is still in the hunt for a big fight against Canelo or Danny Jacobs, but he admitted afterward that he stunk it up.

MIDDLEWEIGHTS

David Lemieux (No. 7 last month) was dropped for a combination of inactivity and an apparent move up in weight. His departure created space at No. 10 for 2012 Olympic silver medalist Esquiva Falcao, who sports an impressive 25-0 (17 KOs) record but hasn't faced a real test yet.

JUNIOR MIDDLEWEIGHTS

Can we officially stop saying that Erickson Lubin is on a comeback from his first-round loss to Jermell Charlo in 2017 and just acknowledge that he's back to kicking ass? His fourth post-Charlo victory broke the stoppage streak, but he thoroughly dominated an overmatched Nathaniel Gallimore (unrated) en route to a near shutout on the cards. It wasn't enough for Lubin to advance past his No. 9 ranking, however; it'll take a next-level opponent for that.

Brian Castano (No. 5) and Michel Soro (No. 8) held onto their spots with a pair of fifth-round stoppages against Wale Omotoso and Cedric Vitu, respectively.

Super middleweight beltholder Billy Joe Saunders advanced in the rankings after a tougher-than-expected challenge from unrated Marcelo Coceres.

WELTERWEIGHTS

No changes.

JUNIOR WELTERWEIGHTS

With Taylor and Prograis going into their fight as Nos. 2 and 1, Taylor assumed the vacant championship (combined with the IBF and WBA titles) and Prograis dropped to No. 2, which left Jose Ramirez as the No. 1 contender and an empty spot at No. 10 for undefeated Californian Arnold Barboza.

LIGHTWEIGHTS

Wanting to ease the sting of being knocked out by Lomachenko in April before calling it a career, Anthony Crolla (No. 8 last month) went before his hometown admirers in Manchester and was fortunate to get out with a majority decision win over Peruvian Frank Urquiaga (unrated). But a win is a good time to walk away, and the hugely popular Crolla leaves the game having ridden a roller coaster that brought everything from a world title to a life-threatening attack by a burglar. His recovery from the latter earned him The Ring's Most Inspirational award for 2015. With Crolla's four-year run in the ratings over, a spot opened up at No. 10 for the return of Yvan Mendy.

Ryan Garcia made a statement – a very brief one – in his biggest fight so far, knocking out Romero Duno halfway through the first round on the Canelo-Kovalev undercard. "KingRy" rose from No. 9 to No. 6 as a result. Devin Haney took the outboxing route to his own emphatic win, scoring a 12-round shutout (with a fifth-round knockdown to boot) over Alfredo Santiago to defend his WBC title and hold his position at No. 2 in the ratings.

JUNIOR LIGHTWEIGHTS

Jason Sosa (unrated) had already gone

Talented featherweight Shakur Stevenson moved up a notch in the rankings by outclassing fellow unbeaten prospect Joet Gonzalez.

through the experience of being cannon fodder for Lomachenko in 2017, but even that probably didn't compare to the next-day pain of the all-out pounding Miguel Berchelt gave him on November 2. By Round 4, the New Jersey native's corner had seen enough and threw in the towel. It was the sixth defense of the WBC title for Berchelt (No. 1), who is now said to be targeting new division member Oscar Valdez.

Jamel Herring (No. 5) defended his WBO title with a unanimous decision over Lamont Roach but narrowly missed disaster when he was wobbled by a sweeping right at the end of Round 11. Herring credited the presence of fellow Marines in the audience – on Veterans Day weekend, no less – as his motivation to suck it up and stay on his feet.

FEATHERWEIGHTS

Shakur Stevenson (No. 7 last month) made easy work of No. 10-rated Joet Gonzalez with a bewilderingly agile performance that saw the 2016 Olympic silver medalist sniping at Gonzalez with jabs and body shots all night. Stevenson rose to No. 6 and Gonzalez was replaced by Filipino contender Mark Magsayo.

JUNIOR FEATHERWEIGHTS

No changes.

BANTAMWEIGHTS

Chicago son Joshua Greer got up from a knockdown to win a not-so-great unanimous decision over Antonio Nieves (unrated) to hold his place at No. 9. Inoue defended his Ring championship and IBF title, plus picked up Donaire's WBA belt and the Muhammad Ali trophy with his hard-fought UD in Japan. Donaire, with no more belt but absolutely nothing to be ashamed of, held his position at No. 3. On the undercard, Nordine Oubaali (No. 4 last month) also maintained his rank after defending his WBC title and perfect record with a unanimous decision over Naoya's younger brother, Takuma. Oubaali floored Inoue with a big left in Round 4, but the Japanese challenger was otherwise game, just underpowered; he fell from No. 7 to No. 10 as a result. No. 6-rated Jason Moloney stayed put after scoring a second-round knockout of Dixon Flores (unrated) with a perfect left hook to the liver.

JUNIOR BANTAMWEIGHTS

Jason's twin brother, Andrew (No. 7), survived a close call in the fifth round against Elton Dharry (unrated) in Australia, rebounding until the fight was called off in the ninth due to a cut over Dharry's eye. Francisco Rodriguez Jr. remained at No. 8 after a third-round stoppage of William Riera (unrated), who surrendered due to an apparent shoulder injury after throwing an overhand left but was overmatched anyway.

FLYWEIGHTS

No changes.

JUNIOR FLYWEIGHTS

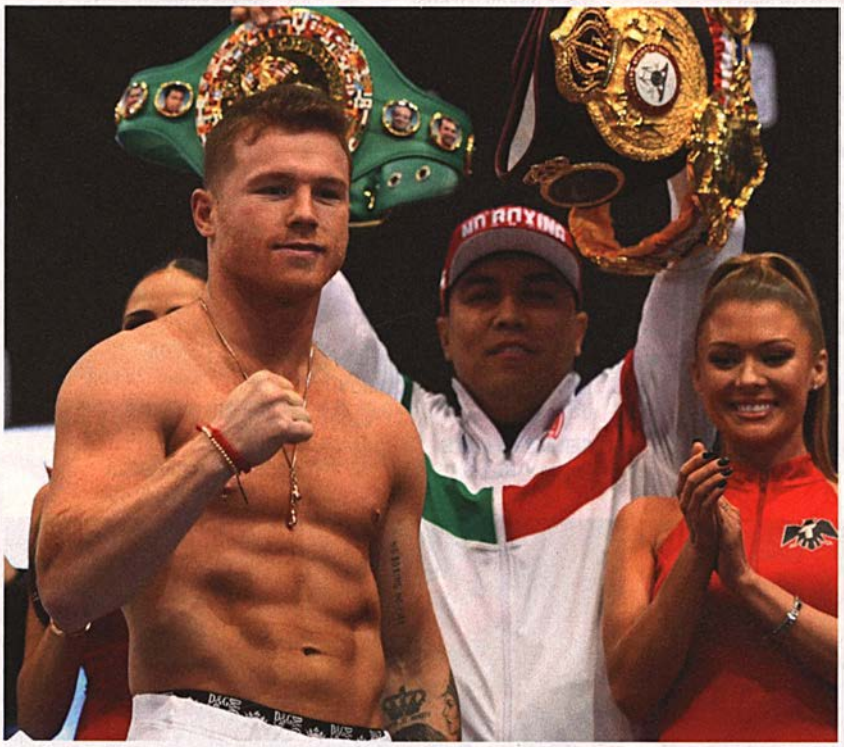
In the first defense of his WBO title, Elwin Soto (No. 5) got past a flash knockdown in Round 3 and rallied in the second half of his fight against Edward Heno (No. 7 last month) to win a close but unanimous decision. Soto maintained his position while Heno dropped a notch to No. 8.

STRAWWEIGHTS

Of all the wonders that exist in Thailand, Wanheng Menayothin has become one of the most intriguing. He never leaves the country, but a look at his record will show that he's not simply some Col. Kurtz-like deceiver destroying the weak; it's just that he gets everybody to come to him. In 2014, Mexico's Oswaldo Novoa brought the WBC title to Thailand and left without it after getting stopped in nine rounds. Since then, Menayothin has hung the belt out like bait for anyone who wants a shot, and he has defended it 12 times against challengers from Japan, South Korea, Australia, Panama, Mexico and the Philippines, raising his record to a peerless 54-0. The latest to try his luck was South Africa's Simpiwe Konkco (No. 5 last month), who came up far short on the cards after being overpowered by the aggressive Thai fighter. Konkco dropped to No. 8 after the loss and Menayothin (No. 2 last month) finally jumped over Knockout CP Freshmart to No. 1, thus making him the best and most invisible strawweight in the world.

RATINGS

THE RING RATINGS THROUGH FIGHTS OF NOV. 16, 2019



Canelo Alvarez is currently in the pound-for-pound (No. 1), middleweight (champion), super middleweight (No. 5) and light heavyweight (No. 2) rankings.

ETHAN MILLER

1 CANELO ALVAREZ
Mexico • 53-1-2 (36 KOs)

2 VASILIY LOMACHENKO
Ukraine • 14-1-0 (10 KOs)

3 NAOYA INOUE
Japan • 19-0-0 (16 KOs)

4 TERENCE CRAWFORD
U.S. • 35-0-0 (26 KOs)

5 ALEKSANDR USYK
Ukraine • 17-0-0 (13 KOs)

6 ERROL SPENCE JR.
U.S. • 26-0-0 (21 KOs)

7 GENNADIY GOLOVKIN
Kazakhstan • 40-1-1 (35 KOs)

8 JUAN FRANCISCO ESTRADA
Mexico • 40-3-0 (27 KOs)

9 ARTUR BETERBIEV
Russia • 15-0-0 (15 KOs)

10 MANNY PACQUIAO
Philippines • 62-7-2 (39 KOs)

HEAVYWEIGHTS
WEIGHT UNLIMITED

C (VACANT)

1 TYSON FURY
U.K. • 29-0-1 (20 KOs)

2 DEONTAY WILDER
U.S. • 41-0-1 (40 KOs)

3 ANDY RUIZ JR.
U.S. • 33-1-0 (22 KOs)

4 ANTHONY JOSHUA
U.K. • 22-1-0 (21 KOs)

5 DILLIAN WHYTE
U.K. • 26-1-0 (18 KOs)

6 LUIS ORTIZ
Cuba • 31-1-0 (26 KOs)

7 ALEXANDER POVETKIN
Russia • 35-2-0 (24 KOs)

8 JOSEPH PARKER
New Zealand • 26-2-0 (20 KOs)

9 ADAM KOWNACKI
U.S. • 20-0-0 (15 KOs)

10 KUBRAT PULEV
Bulgaria • 28-1-0 (14 KOs)

CRUISERWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 200 POUNDS

C (VACANT)

1 MAIRIS BRIEDIS
Latvia • 26-1-0 (19 KOs)

2 YUNIER DORTICOS
Cuba • 24-1-0 (22 KOs)

3 KRZYSZTOF GLOWACKI
Poland • 31-2-0 (19 KOs)

4 ILUNGA MAKABU
Congo • 26-2-0 (24 KOs)

5 KEVIN LERENA
S. Africa • 24-1-0 (11 KOs)

6 ANDREW TABITI
U.S. • 17-1-0 (13 KOs)

7 LAWRENCE OKOLIE
U.K. • 14-0-0 (11 KOs)

8 ARSEN GOULAMIRIAN
France • 25-0-0 (17 KOs)

9 MICHAL CIESLAK
Poland • 19-0-0 (13 KOs)

10 ALEXSEI PAPIN
Russia • 11-1-0 (10 KOs)

LIGHT HEAVYWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 175 POUNDS

C (VACANT)

1 ARTUR BETERBIEV
Russia • 15-0-0 (15 KOs)

2 CANELO ALVAREZ
Mexico • 53-1-2 (36 KOs)

3 OLEKSANDR GVOZDYK
Ukraine • 17-1-0 (14 KOs)

4 DMITRY BIVOL
Russia • 17-0-0 (11 KOs)

5 SERGEY KOVALEV
Russia • 34-4-1 (29 KOs)

6 ELEIDER ALVAREZ
Colombia • 24-1-0 (12 KOs)

7 BADOU JACK
Sweden • 22-2-3 (13 KOs)

8 JEAN PASCAL
Canada • 34-6-1 (20 KOs)

9 JESSE HART
U.S. • 26-2-0 (21 KOs)

10 MARCUS BROWNE
U.S. • 23-1-0 (16 KOs)

SUPER MIDDLEWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 168 POUNDS

C CALLUM SMITH
U.K. • 26-0-0 (19 KOs)

1 DAVID BENAVIDEZ
U.S. • 22-0-0 (19 KOs)

2 GILBERTO RAMIREZ
Mexico • 40-0-0 (26 KOs)

3 CALEB PLANT
U.S. • 19-0-0 (11 KOs)

4 ANTHONY DIRRELL
U.S. • 33-2-1 (24 KOs)

5 CANELO ALVAREZ
Mexico • 53-1-2 (36 KOs)

6 BILLY JOE SAUNDERS
U.K. • 29-0-0 (14 KOs)

7 CHRIS EUBANK JR.
U.K. • 28-2-0 (21 KOs)

8 JOSE UZCATEGUI
Venezuela • 29-3-0 (24 KOs)

9 CALEB TRUAX
U.S. • 30-4-2 (19 KOs)

10 AVNI YILDIRIM
Turkey • 21-2-0 (12 KOs)

RATINGS

Through fights of November 16, 2019

MIDDLEWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 160 POUNDS

- **C** **CANELO ALVAREZ** Mexico • 53-1-2 (36 KOs)
- **1** **GENNADIY GOLOVKIN** Kaz. • 40-1-1 (35 KOs)
- **2** **DANIEL JACOBS** U.S. • 35-3-0 (29 KOs)
- **3** **DEMETRIUS ANDRADE** U.S. • 28-0-0 (17 KOs)
- **4** **JERMALL CHARLO** U.S. • 29-0-0 (21 KOs)
- **5** **SERGIY DEREVYANCHENKO** Ukraine • 13-2-0 (10 KOs)
- **6** **RYOTA MURATA** Japan • 15-2-0 (12 KOs)
- **7** **KAMIL SZEREMETA** Poland • 21-0-0 (5 KOs)
- **8** **MACIEJ SULECKI** Poland • 28-2-0 (11 KOs)
- **9** **ROB BRANT** U.S. • 25-2-0 (17 KOs)
- **10** **ESQUIVA FALCAO** Brazil • 25-0-0 (17 KOs)

JR. MIDDLEWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 154 POUNDS

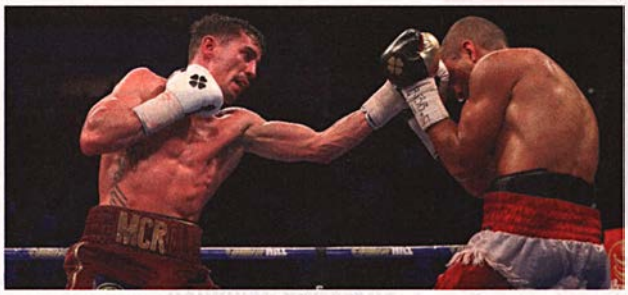
- **C** **(VACANT)**
- **1** **JULIAN WILLIAMS** U.S. • 27-1-1 (16 KOs)
- **2** **JARRETT HURD** U.S. • 23-1-0 (16 KOs)
- **3** **ERISLANDY LARA** Cuba • 26-3-3 (15 KOs)
- **4** **JAIME MUNGUIA** Mexico • 34-0-0 (27 KOs)
- **5** **BRIAN CASTANO** Argentina • 16-0-1 (12 KOs)
- **6** **TONY HARRISON** U.S. • 28-2-0 (21 KOs)
- **7** **JERMELL CHARLO** U.S. • 32-1-0 (16 KOs)
- **8** **MICHEL SORO** France • 35-2-1 (24 KOs)
- **9** **ERICKSON LUBIN** U.S. • 22-1-0 (16 KOs)
- **10** **KELL BROOK** U.K. • 38-2-0 (26 KOs)

WELTERWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 147 POUNDS

- **C** **(VACANT)**
- **1** **ERROL SPENCE JR.** U.S. • 26-0-0 (21 KOs)
- **2** **TERENCE CRAWFORD** U.S. • 35-0-0 (26 KOs)
- **3** **MANNY PACQUIAO** Phil. • 62-7-2 (39 KOs)
- **4** **KEITH THURMAN** U.S. • 29-1-0 (22 KOs)
- **5** **SHAWN PORTER** U.S. • 30-3-1 (17 KOs)
- **6** **DANNY GARCIA** U.S. • 35-2-0 (21 KOs)
- **7** **YORDENIS UGAS** Cuba • 24-4-0 (11 KOs)
- **8** **EGIDIJUS KAVALIAUSKAS** Lithuania • 21-0-1 (17 KOs)
- **9** **KUDRATILLO ABDUKAKHOROV** Uzbekistan • 17-0-0 (9 KOs)
- **10** **SERGEY LIPINETS** Russia • 16-1-0 (12 KOs)

JR. WELTERWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 140 POUNDS

- **C** **JOSH TAYLOR** U.K. • 16-0-0 (12 KOs)
- **1** **JOSE RAMIREZ** U.S. • 25-0-0 (17 KOs)
- **2** **REGIS PROGRAIS** U.S. • 24-1-0 (20 KOs)
- **3** **IVAN BARANCHYK** Russia • 20-1-0 (13 KOs)
- **4** **VIKTOR POSTOL** Ukraine • 31-2-0 (12 KOs)
- **5** **KIRYL RELIKH** Belarus • 23-3-0 (19 KOs)
- **6** **MAURICE HOOKER** U.S. • 26-1-3 (17 KOs)
- **7** **SUBRIEL MATIAS** Puerto Rico • 14-0-0 (14 KOs)
- **8** **JOSE ZEPEDA** U.S. • 31-2-0 (25 KOs)
- **9** **MARIO BARRIOS** U.S. • 25-0-0 (16 KOs)
- **10** **ARNOLD BARBOZA** U.S. • 22-0-0 (9 KOs)



Anthony Crolla made the final appearance of his career with a too-close-for-comfort majority decision over Frank Urquiaga in Manchester.

Lawrence Okolie (right) advanced to No. 7 in the cruiserweight rankings with a seventh-round KO of No. 9-rated Yves Ngabu.

LIGHTWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 135 POUNDS

- **C** **VASILIY LOMACHENKO** Ukraine • 14-1-0 (10 KOs)
- **1** **RICHARD COMMEY** Ghana • 29-2-0 (26 KOs)
- **2** **DEVIN HANEY** U.S. • 24-0-0 (15 KOs)
- **3** **TEOFIMO LOPEZ** U.S. • 14-0-0 (11 KOs)
- **4** **LUKE CAMPBELL** U.K. • 20-3-0 (16 KOs)
- **5** **ROBERT EASTER** U.S. • 22-1-1 (14 KOs)
- **6** **RYAN GARCIA** U.S. • 19-0-0 (16 KOs)
- **7** **JAVIER FORTUNA** Dom. Rep. • 35-2-1 (24 KOs)
- **8** **EMMANUEL TAGOE** Ghana • 31-1-0 (15 KOs)
- **9** **RANCES BARTHELEMY** Cuba • 27-1-1 (14 KOs)
- **10** **YVAN MENDY** France • 43-5-1 (21 KOs)

JR. LIGHTWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 130 POUNDS

- **C** **(VACANT)**
- **1** **MIGUEL BERCHELT** Mexico • 37-1-0 (33 KOs)
- **2** **GERVONTA DAVIS** U.S. • 22-0-0 (21 KOs)
- **3** **TEVIN FARMER** U.S. • 30-4-1 (6 KOs)
- **4** **ANDREW CANCIO** U.S. • 21-4-2 (16 KOs)
- **5** **JAMEL HERRING** U.S. • 21-2-0 (10 KOs)
- **6** **JOSEPH DIAZ JR.** U.S. • 30-1-0 (15 KOs)
- **7** **MASAYUKI ITO** Japan • 26-2-1 (14 KOs)
- **8** **MIGUEL ROMAN** Mexico • 62-13-0 (47 KOs)
- **9** **RENE ALVARADO** Nicaragua • 31-8-0 (20 KOs)
- **10** **SHAVKATDZHON RAKHIMOV** Russia • 15-0-0 (12 KOs)

FEATHERWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 126 POUNDS

- **C** **(VACANT)**
- **1** **LEO SANTA CRUZ** U.S. • 36-1-1 (19 KOs)
- **2** **JOSH WARRINGTON** U.K. • 30-0-0 (7 KOs)
- **3** **GARY RUSSELL JR.** U.S. • 30-1-0 (18 KOs)
- **4** **OSCAR VALDEZ** Mexico • 26-0-0 (20 KOs)
- **5** **CARL FRAMPTON** U.K. • 26-2-0 (15 KOs)
- **6** **XU CAN** China • 17-2-0 (3 KOs)
- **7** **SHAKUR STEVENSON** U.S. • 13-0-0 (7 KOs)
- **8** **TUGSTSOGT NYAMBAYAR** Mongolia • 11-0-0 (9 KOs)
- **9** **KID GALAHAD** U.K. • 26-1-0 (15 KOs)
- **10** **JOET GONZALEZ** U.S. • 23-1-0 (14 KOs)

JR. FEATHERWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 122 POUNDS

- **C** **(VACANT)**
- **1** **DANIEL ROMAN** U.S. • 27-2-1 (10 KOs)
- **2** **REY VARGAS** Mexico • 34-0-0 (22 KOs)
- **3** **EMANUEL NAVARRETE** Mexico • 29-1-0 (25 KOs)
- **4** **GUILLERMO RIGONDEAUX** Cuba • 19-1-0 (13 KOs)
- **5** **TJ DOHENY** Australia • 22-1-0 (16 KOs)
- **6** **RYOSUKE IWASA** Japan • 26-3-0 (16 KOs)
- **7** **BRANDON FIGUEROA** U.S. • 20-0-0 (15 KOs)
- **8** **TOMOKI KAMEDA** Japan • 36-3-0 (20 KOs)
- **9** **ISAAC DOGBOE** Ghana • 20-2-0 (14 KOs)
- **10** **AZAT HOVHANNISYAN** Armenia • 18-3-0 (15 KOs)

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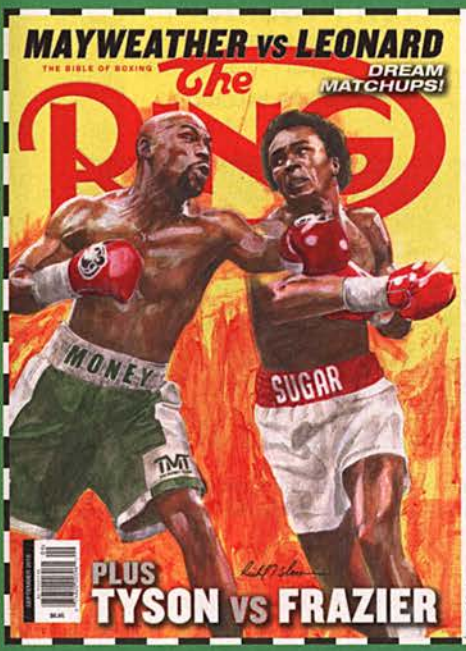

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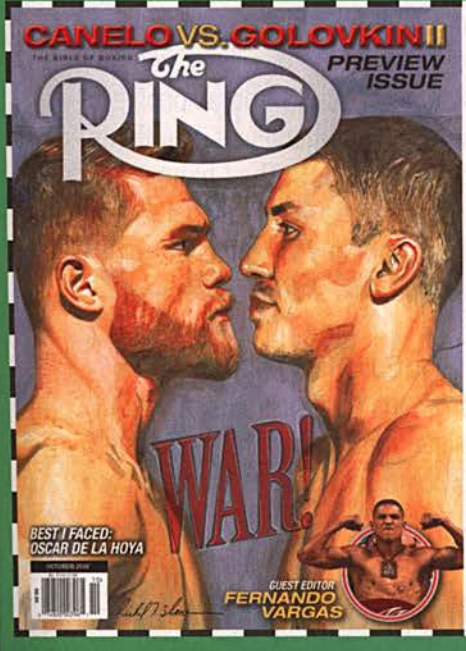

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RATINGS

Through fights of November 16, 2019

BANTAMWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 118 POUNDS

- **C NAOYA INOUE** Japan • 19-0-0 (16 KOs)
- **1 LUIS NERY** Mexico • 30-0-0 (24 KOs)
- **2 ZOLANI TETE** S. Africa • 28-3-0 (21 KOs)
- **3 NONITO DONAIRE** Phil. • 40-6-0 (26 KOs)
- **4 NORDINE OUBAALI** France • 17-0-0 (12 KOs)
- **5 EMMANUEL RODRIGUEZ** P.R. • 19-1-0 (12 KOs)
- **6 JASON MOLONEY** Australia • 20-1-0 (17 KOs)
- **7 CARLOS CUADRAS** Mexico • 39-3-1 (27 KOs)
- **8 JOSHUA GREER** U.S. • 22-1-1 (12 KOs)
- **9 JOHN RIEL CASIMERO** Philippines • 28-4–0 (19 KOs)
- **10 TAKUMA INOUE** Japan • 13-1-0 (3 KOs)

JR. BANTAMWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 115 POUNDS

- **C JUAN FRANCISCO ESTRADA** Mexico • 40-3-0 (27 KOs)
- **1 SRISAKET SOR RUNGVISAI** Thailand • 47-5-1 (41 KOs)
- **2 DONNIE NIETES** Phil. • 42-1-5 (23 KOs)
- **3 KAZUTO IOKA** Japan • 24-2-0 (14 KOs)
- **4 KHALID YAFAI** U.K. • 26-0-0 (15 KOs)
- **5 JERWIN ANCAJAS** Phil. • 31-1-2 (21 KOs)
- **6 ROMAN GONZALEZ** Nicaragua • 47-2-0 (39 KOs)
- **7 ANDREW MOLONEY** Australia • 21-0-0 (14 KOs)
- **8 FRANCISCO RODRIGUEZ JR.** Mexico • 32-4-1 (23 KOs)
- **9 JEYVIER CINTRON** P.R. • 11-0-0 (5 KOs)
- **10 ALEJANDRO BARRIOS** Mexico • 20-2-5 (10 KOs)

FLYWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 112 POUNDS

- **C (VACANT)**
- **1 KOSEI TANAKA** Japan • 14-0-0 (8 KOs)
- **2 MORUTI MTHALANE** S. Africa • 38-2-0 (25 KOs)
- **3 ARTEM DALAKIAN** Ukraine • 19-0-0 (14 KOs)
- **4 JULIO CESAR MARTINEZ** Mexico • 14-1-0 (11 KOs)
- **5 CHARLIE EDWARDS** U.K. • 15-1-0 (6 KOs)
- **6 ANDREW SELBY** U.K. • 13-1-0 (7 KOs)
- **7 CRISTOFER ROSALES** Nicaragua • 29-4-0 (20 KOs)
- **8 MASAYUKI KURODA** Japan • 30-8-3 (16 KOs)
- **9 JUNTO NAKATANI** Japan • 20-0-0 (15 KOs)
- **10 RYOICHI TAGUCHI** Japan • 27-4-2 (12 KOs)

JR. FLYWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 108 POUNDS

- **C HIROTO KYOGUCHI** Japan • 14-0-0 (9 KOs)
- **1 KEN SHIRO** Japan • 16-0-0 (9 KOs)
- **2 HEKKIE BUDLER** S. Africa • 32-4-0 (10 KOs)
- **3 CARLOS CANIZALES** Venezuela • 22-0-1 (17 KOs)
- **4 FELIX ALVARADO** Nicaragua • 35-2-0 (30 KOs)
- **5 ELWIN SOTO** Mexico • 16-1-0 (11 KOs)
- **6 ANGEL ACOSTA** P.R. • 21-2-0 (21 KOs)
- **7 TETSUYA HISADA** Japan • 34-10-2 (20 KOs)
- **8 EDWARD HENO** Phil. • 14-1-5 (5 KOs)
- **9 SHO KIMURA** Japan • 18-3-2 (11 KOs)
- **10 DANIEL VALLADARES** Mexico • 21-1-0 (13 KOs)

Jamel Herring (right) kept his belt and position in the junior lightweight ratings despite a perilous Round 11 against Lamont Roach.

Erickson Lubin held his No. 9 place in the junior middleweight rankings with a decision over unrated Nathaniel Gallimore.

STRAWWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 105 POUNDS

- **C (VACANT)**
- **1 WANHENG MENAYOTHIN** Thailand • 54-0-0 (18 KOs)
- **2 KNOCKOUT CP FRESHMART** Thailand • 20-0-0 (7 KOs)
- **3 WILFREDO MENDEZ** Puerto Rico • 15-1-0 (5 KOs)
- **4 BYRON ROJAS** Nicaragua • 27-4-3 (11 KOs)
- **5 DEEJAY KRIEL** S. Africa • 15-1-1 (7 KOs)
- **6 VIC SALUDAR** Phil. • 19-4-0 (10 KOs)
- **7 JOSE ARGUMEDO** Mexico • 23-4-1 (14 KOs)
- **8 SIMPIWE KONKCO** S. Africa • 19-6-0 (7 KOs)
- **9 PEDRO TADURAN** Phil. • 14-2-0 (11 KOs)
- **10 CARLOS LICONA** U.S. • 15-1-0 (2 KOs)

HOW OUR RATINGS ARE COMPILED
RECORDS PROVIDED BY BOXREC.COM

Championship vacancies can be filled in the following two ways: 1. The Ring's Nos. 1 and 2 contenders fight one another. 2. If the Nos. 1 and 2 contenders choose not to fight one another and No. 1 fights No. 3, that matchup could be for the Ring title if the Editorial Board deems No. 3 worthy.

A champion can lose his belt in six situations: 1. The Champion loses a fight in the weight class in which he is champion; 2. The Champion moves to another weight class; 3. The Champion does not schedule a fight in any weight class for 18 months, although injuries and certain other unforeseen circumstances could be taken into consideration; 4. The Champion does not schedule a fight at his championship weight for 18 months (even if he fights at another weight); 5. The Champion does not schedule a fight with a Top-5 contender from any weight class for two years; 6. The Champion retires.

The Ring Editorial Board considers input from the Ratings Panel of boxing journalists from around the world and then decides collectively what changes will be made. That applies to both the pound-for-pound and divisional ratings.

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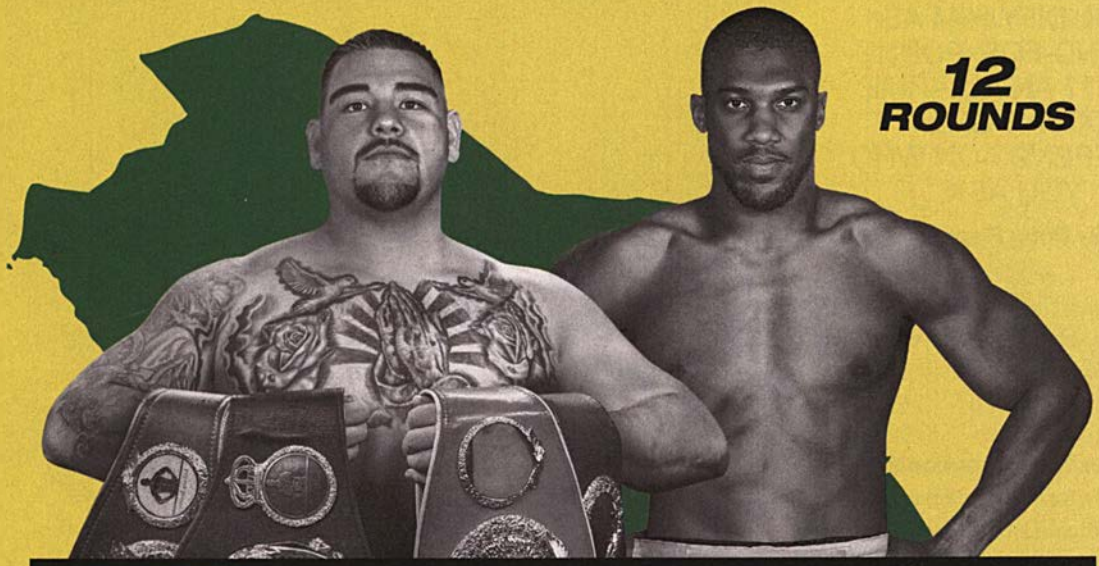

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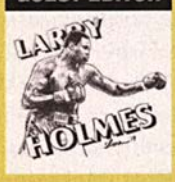
ANDY RUIZ vs. ANTHONY JOSHUA II

GUEST EDITOR



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CANELO IN CONTEXT

DID **CANELO ALVAREZ'S** KO OF **SERGEY KOVALEV** SOLIDIFY HIM AS POUND-FOR-POUND NO. 1? AN ALL-TIME MEXICAN GREAT? IT DEPENDS ON WHO YOU ASK.

By **Doug Fischer**

If you take the promotion's word, Canelo Alvarez's light heavyweight title-winning KO of Sergey Kovalev made him the first fighter since Henry Armstrong to simultaneously hold world titles in three weight classes and Mexico's greatest boxer ever, next to Julio Cesar Chavez.

If you believe Alvarez's critics, which include some legendary Mexican boxers, his resume is rather thin once you remove the names of the "old" and "faded" veterans he faced on his way to the pinnacle of the sport. And while they acknowledge that Alvarez has developed into an elite boxer, they don't believe he deserves to be No. 1 in The Ring Magazine's pound-for-pound rankings (or anyone's mythical ratings, including the Transnational Boxing Rankings Board, which also views the Mexican star as numero uno).

Canelo Alvarez did what few middleweights (and fewer junior middleweights) have ever done by winning a 175-pound title from Sergey Kovalev. But his critics say Kovalev was ripe for the taking (like previous opponents). Where should Alvarez be ranked after his latest victory?

VALERY SHARIFULIN\TASS VIA GETTY IMAGES

So, which is it?

Is Alvarez the best boxer on the planet? Has he achieved greatness at age 29? Or is he just a very good, very popular fighter whose boxing career is a carefully crafted mirage that has been managed, over the past decade, by Golden Boy Promotions and several broadcast partners, including the Televisa and TV Azteca networks in Mexico, Showtime, HBO and now DAZN?

The truth is usually somewhere between extreme opinions.

Let's start with the Kovalev fight.

Despite making his light heavyweight debut against an experienced defending titleholder, Alvarez was the overwhelming favorite among oddsmakers, media and hardcore fans, many of whom viewed Kovalev as the "weak link" among the top-tier 175-pounders.

And many predicted that Alvarez would overwhelm Kovalev the moment his gloves tapped the Russian veteran's body, which was deemed "vulnerable" due to Kovalev's rematch loss to Andre Ward and a rocky Round 8 against Anthony Yarde in his most recent title defense.

Some called Kovalev a faded fighter and viewed Alvarez's choice to face him – rather than a punisher like Artur Beterbiev or a talented stylist like Dmitry Bivol – as a "cherry pick."

These opinions seemed a bit harsh to me.

For starters, The Ring and every other media ratings panel had Kovalev in the top three of their 175-pound rankings prior to the Alvarez fight. It was fair to say that Kovalev, at age 36, was no longer in his prime, or that he was no longer "The Krusher" that had terrorized light heavyweights from 2013-2016. After all, he'd been stopped by Ward in June 2017 and knocked out by Eleider Alvarez in August 2018. However, he'd also rebounded to outclass Alvarez over 12 rounds to regain the WBO title, which he defended with an 11th-round KO of Yarde. If Kovalev were "shot" or even "faded," as some claimed, he would not have won his first two bouts of 2019.

Eleider Alvarez had been a top-

Canelo's team touted him as a four-division titleholder after the Kovalev victory.

rated (and avoided) light heavyweight for years. The Canada-based Colombian was undefeated, as was Yarde, a powerful physical specimen from England. Both stand 6 feet tall with 76-inch wingspans.

Canelo, the reigning Ring Magazine middleweight champion who stands 5-foot-8 with a 70½-inch wingspan, was taking a physical risk by leapfrogging super middleweight (where he'd dominated a disinterested Julio Cesar Chavez Jr. and an overmatched Rocky Fielding) to face a still-dangerous Kovalev.

Was it a calculated risk? Yes, of course. He and trainer Eddy Reynoso obviously saw technical flaws that they could exploit (such as Kovalev's lack of infighting skills) and they knew there was wear and tear on the Russian, who hasn't led a Spartan lifestyle outside of training camps.

But a lot of world-class experience came with that wear and tear, as well as numerous accolades. Kovalev is by far the most accomplished of the light heavyweight titleholders.

It's ridiculous to think that Alvarez would select Beterbiev (who had yet to unify IBF and WBC titles with an impressive stoppage of Oleksandr Gvozdyk) or Bivol over Kovalev, who won The Ring's 2014 Fighter of the Year award after being a strong candidate in 2013.

Kovalev (34-4-1, 29 KOs) unified three world titles and earned his way into pound-for-pound rankings when he shut out the great Bernard Hopkins in November 2014. Prior to accepting Canelo's challenge, he had faced six world titleholders and had victories over all of them with the exception of Ward (who many believe received a gift decision against Kovalev in their first bout).

What had Gvozdyk, Beterbiev and Bivol accomplished by September 2019 when Canelo-Kovalev was announced? Did their combined achievements equal what Kovalev had done? No, they were just beltholders with 14 and 17 pro bouts under their belts.

So, how significant was Alvarez's victory over the former light heavyweight world-beater?

Was it historic, as Golden Boy and DAZN trumpeted before and after the November 2 event in Las Vegas? The main selling point of the promotion was that Alvarez had become only the fourth four-division titleholder from Mexico by winning the WBO 175-pound title.

But The Ring does not recognize the secondary WBA super middleweight title Alvarez won by demolishing Fielding in December 2018, so he hasn't joined Erik Morales, Juan Manuel Marquez and Jorge Arce, according to this publication.

However, he's currently ranked at middleweight, super middleweight and light heavyweight. Can anyone recall the last time a boxer was simultaneously rated in three divisions? We can't either, which is one of the reasons Lee Groves views the Kovalev victory as a historic feat.

"Although I don't yet recognize him as the fourth Mexican to win four divisional championships, Alvarez did produce a boxing first: He is the first reigning middleweight champion to ever dethrone a reigning light heavyweight champion in Kovalev," noted Groves, a boxing historian, author and occasional Ring contributor.

"Also, Alvarez was only the fourth fighter to attempt this feat – Mickey Walker lost to Tommy Loughran in 1929, Sugar Ray Robinson lost to Joey Maxim (and the 104-degree heat) in 1952 and Carl 'Bobo' Olson lost to Archie Moore in 1955, meaning that Alvarez was attempting something that had not been tried in 64 years.

"And, better yet for him, he achieved it in inside-the-distance fashion in what had been a competitive contest. He also joined Sugar Ray Leonard, Thomas Hearns and Mike McCallum as 154-pound titlists to win a widely recognized belt at 175. That's very heady company, and, at this point, he should be considered a virtual shoo-in for Canastota."

Leonard, Hearns and McCallum are all first-ballot Hall of Famers, yet they had their hands full when tussling

with light heavyweights who were not as skilled or accomplished as Kovalev.

It took Hearns, who stands 6-foot-1 with a 78-inch wingspan, 10 rounds to chop down Dennis Andries for his first 175-pound title in 1987. (The Hitman earned his second light heavyweight title with close but unanimous decision over the skilled Virgil Hill in 1991.)

Andries, like his trilogy rival Jeff Harding, was tough as nails but just a straight-forward grinder. Yet, a magnificent technician like McCallum had to settle for a close decision victory (by one- and two-point margins on two scorecards) over an inactive and close-to-retirement version of Harding in 1994.

Donny Lalonde was generally regarded as a one-armed bandit, but the popular puncher still managed to drop Leonard during their entertaining 1988 showdown despite meeting the superstar at a 168-pound catchweight. Leonard rallied to knock out Lalonde in the ninth round, but the Canadian "Golden Boy" was up by one point on one official scorecard and only down by two points on another.

Those who thought Alvarez was trailing Kovalev on points before he scored his chilling 11th-round KO should keep this in mind. It's not easy, even for all-time greats, to do what he did.

"It's not quite as impressive a win as a former welterweight champion beating Virgil Hill, but it's probably on par with the Andries win as a point of recent comparison," said Cliff Rold, a BoxingScene.com columnist with a penchant for historical perspectives.

"Canelo was a unified titlist at 154 pounds. There just aren't that many middleweight champions who have won belts at light heavyweight and he did it with a clean knockout. That said, this isn't Dick Tiger beating Jose Torres. He beat a champ, not THE champ, but it's still a commendable win.

"Even in this watered-down era of titles, Alvarez jumping two classes to beat a top-three light heavyweight has some history, even if in context it's his personal history more than the bigger tapestry of the sport."

Before and after the Kovalev fight, some media outlets asked if Alvarez's "personal history," as Rold put it, could compare with those of the best Mexican boxers of all time.

Morales, who was inducted into the International Boxing Hall of Fame in 2018, answered one of those outlets, ESPN Deportes, with a resounding NO.

"He's fought big names when they are at the end of their career," Morales said. "Shane Mosley was at the end of his career. Miguel Cotto was at the end of his career. Kovalev is at the end of his career. Golovkin is near the end of his career and Canelo has been waiting for him to deteriorate.

"At the end of your career, you have to ask yourself: How do you want to be remembered? And the questions and criticisms of Canelo have been constant. It's because of the types of opponents he chooses. With myself and some others, we chose the best. I chose the best of each division."

With all due respect to El Terrible, whose legacy is beyond reproach, Alvarez has faced the best of divisions he's campaigned in, including Austin Trout and Erislandy Lara – both of whom were in their primes when he fought them at junior middleweight. And, while it's true that some of the former world titleholders he faced on his way up – including Mosley, Carlos Baldomir and Kermit Cintron – were far past their primes, it should be noted that Cotto was the reigning Ring Magazine champ when they fought in November 2015. Golovkin was The Ring's No. 1-rated middleweight when they fought in 2017 and 2018. The unbeaten unified beltholder from Kazakhstan was also No. 1 in The Ring's pound-for-pound rankings at the time. Kovalev was The Ring's No. 2-rated light heavyweight going into their November showdown.

True, Cotto, Golovkin and Kovalev are all older than Alvarez, but

Alvarez's middleweight title-unifying victory over Daniel Jacobs supports his case for being No. 1 pound-for-pound.

ETHAN MILLER

most boxers on his level are. The Guadalajara native turned pro at 15 in October 2005. He won his first world title at 20 (the youngest ever to hold a major 154-pound belt) in March 2011.

To further put Alvarez's "age gap" into perspective, consider that when Kovalev turned pro in July 2009 at 26, the just-turned-19 Alvarez had compiled a 27-0-1 record and was already competing at the 10- and 12-round level.

If fans want Alvarez to fight opponents who are as established and accomplished as he is in the sport, they're going to have to give him a pass for being the younger man with more pro bouts under his belt.

And if they want him to face boxers his age, they're going to have to accept that he's going to have a decided edge in experience.

Compare what Alvarez has accomplished to what other 29-year-old boxing standouts, such as Errol Spence Jr. (who turns 30 in January), Callum Smith, or Jermell and Jermall Charlo, have achieved so far.

Alvarez has faced 15 world titleholders, including four future Hall of Famers (Floyd Mayweather Jr., Mosley, Cotto and Golovkin) – losing only to Mayweather – winning eight major world titles, plus two Ring championships, in three weight classes.

The combined accomplishments of Spence, Smith and the Charlos don't come close to matching Alvarez's resume.

And yet, the criticisms Morales brought up are shared by many fans and members of the media.

The advanced ages of the biggest names on his record, the disputed decisions that went his way in fights vs. Golovkin and Lara and pound-for-pound competition from other elite boxers keeps Alvarez from being recognized as the best boxer on the planet.

Marquez, who is on the International Boxing Hall of Fame's Class of 2020 ballot, still rates Terence Crawford and Vasiliy Lomachenko ahead of Alvarez in the mythical rankings, although he's proud of what his countryman has accomplished.

"He has demonstrated that he is very good," Marquez told assembled media shortly before the Canelo-Kovalev post-fight press conference. "He moved up in weight and won another fight, which is very important, but I think Crawford is No. 1 and we have Lomachenko, who is right up there. In my point of view, I have Canelo at No. 3. He won a great fight. But look, Crawford hasn't lost, and look at what Lomachenko has done. We have to take all that into account."

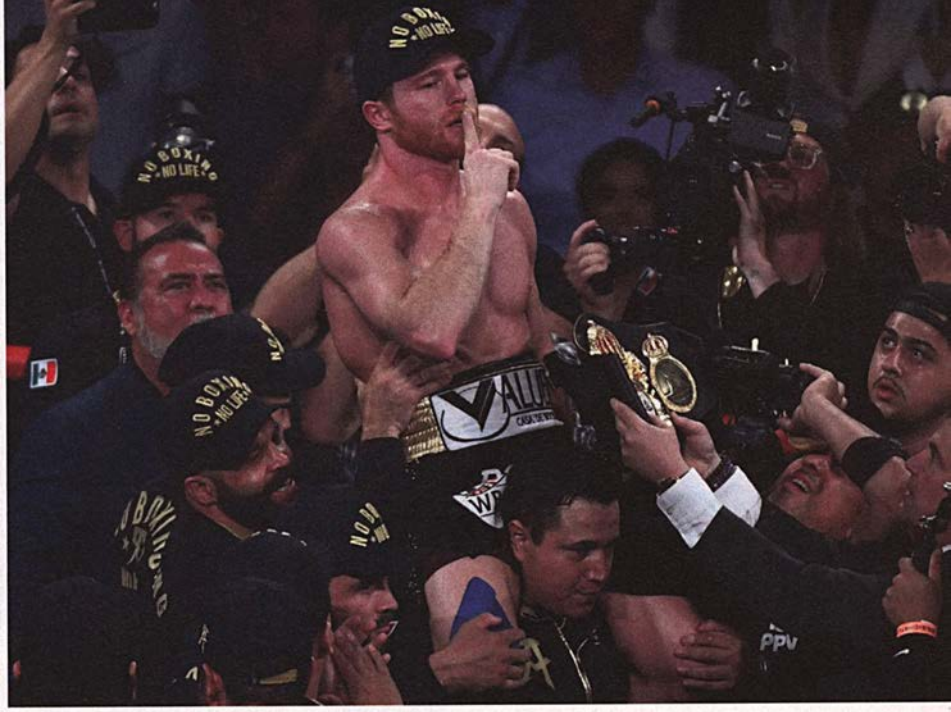
Groves has also taken what Ring bantamweight champion Naoya Inoue has done into consideration.

"Alvarez is No. 4 on my pound-for-pound list behind Lomachenko, Crawford and Inoue," he said. "On paper, this may look harsh, but in my mind the gaps between Nos. 1 and 5, which, to me, is Errol Spence Jr., are very small. All are accomplished and talented fighters, and a credible case can be made for a different spot on the ladder for all of them.

"While The Ring has vaulted Alvarez up the list to No. 1, I believe that Lomachenko, Crawford and Inoue have done nothing to damage their places on my ladder. Lomachenko scored a decisive decision over a tall and difficult southpaw in Luke Campbell before Campbell's home fans to add another lightweight title belt. Crawford has scored knockouts in his last six fights, all in title bouts that saw him defend and become undisputed at 140 while also winning a third divisional title at 147 and defending it twice. Inoue became a unified titlist at 118 pounds – his third championship weight class – by beating an inspired and courageous future Hall of Famer in Nonito Donaire in one of the year's better fights.

"Today's pound-for-pound list is a tough neighborhood to work, and it requires observers to split hairs in order to come to a placement – and we observers have widely different and legitimate reasons for our choices. For me, the decision to have Alvarez fourth is based in part on my opinion that he lost both fights against Gennadiy Golovkin – the first decisively and the second by a lesser margin because he fought better and smarter in the rematch. But I also recognize his victories over the dangerous Daniel Jacobs as well as against the respected and larger Kovalev in his two most recent

Alvarez didn't win a Ring-recognized title from Fielding, but the KO got him ranked at super middleweight.



Even those who refute Alvarez's No. 1 pound-for-pound status admit that he's among the best.

ETHAN MILLER

outings. One can approach the pound-for-pound list as a snapshot of the best at that very moment, like Jim Lampley did on his HBO show The Fight Game, or one can factor in performances over a period of time like I and many others do."

Rold agrees with Groves but won't argue with anyone that views Alvarez's body of work as proof that he's No. 1.

"Canelo has a case for pound-for-pound No. 1, although I don't quite have him there," he said. "He has the deepest resume among prime guys. One can point to a handful of debatable decisions, such as Lara and Golovkin, but, outside of Mayweather, he was in those fights. They weren't Lewis-Holyfield I.

"In 2019, he's put together a pair of wins as good as any in his career in Jacobs and Kovalev. There was no debate on either and both were highly rated in their weight classes. He's steady if not always spectacular, but it's hard to shake the feeling when watching him that he never feels like the best fighter in the world. Time and more challenges may make his resume too overwhelming to deny, but right now, the physical talent and skill sets of guys like Inoue, Crawford, and Lomachenko make it a fun debate."

When it comes to debating Alvarez's place among the Mexican greats, Rold sides with Morales, for now.

"I don't know where he rates all-time with great Mexicans," he said. "You can make a broad argument, but he doesn't sniff a Chavez yet or even any of the three titans of recent lore: Morales, Barrera, and Marquez. They all had deeper resumes and their defining wins were just better. He doesn't have a Sanchez-Gomez moment yet. Whether he ever does remains to be seen."

Groves has seen enough to consider Alvarez among Mexico's top 10 boxers of all time, but nowhere close to Chavez's hallowed spot at the top.

"Despite my misgivings about the Golovkin fights, Alvarez is moving up the charts on the greatest Mexican fighters list, and, at age 29, he has plenty of time to add to his resume," he said. "Alvarez is definitely in the conversation and he has a chance to end up very high on the consensus list, if not at the very top depending on how he proceeds from here.

"To me, he still has to remove Julio Cesar Chavez from the mountaintop, because he has the most title fight victories in boxing history with 31, including a 25-0 start, was a three-division titlist who put together significantly long reigns at 130 pounds and especially at 140, and he was the No. 1 pound-for-pound fighter for three consecutive years in The Ring's year-end rankings. Alvarez has been a pound-for-pounder for a while, but he's not yet at Chavez's standard. Breaking into the top 10 among Mexican fighters is a big deal in itself because of the depth and breadth of the nation's boxing history and the rightful reverence it has earned among fans and historians. So, him not being at the very top right now is definitely not a slight; it is an acknowledgement of just how great his predecessors were."

Victor Cota, a noted Mexican historian who covered and chronicled the career of Chavez, as well as those of other greats, such as Salvador Sanchez, Ruben Olivares and Miguel Canto, believes Alvarez has already surpassed many of his country's boxing legends.

"I have no doubt that Canelo is one of the 10 best Mexican boxers ever," Cota told The Ring through translator Nancy Rodriguez. "I am not only convinced of it, but I think that he and Julio Cesar Chavez are at the top of the list.

"I recognize his knockout of Kovalev as one of the most significant victories by a Mexican fighter, not only in recent decades, but of all time," continued Cota, who is in his late 70s and on the International Boxing Hall of Fame's Class of 2020 ballot in the Observer category. "I'm impressed by Alvarez because, like Chavez was, he's the biggest attraction in contemporary boxing, but he remains a serious boxer, dedicated and responsible in everything that surrounds his career."

Cota might be in the minority with his high opinion of Alvarez's historical standing, but he hit the nail on the head regarding the young superstar's dedication to the sport. Alvarez has continued to improve, fight by fight, year after year, even as his stature and bank accounts have skyrocketed.

He may not be No. 1 on your pound-for-pound list or in the class of Chavez, Barrera, Morales and Marquez, yet, but he's headed in the right direction.

IN THE INNER SANCTUM:

CANELO ALVAREZ READIES TO BATTLE SERGEY KOVALEV

By **Thomas Hauser**

Canelo Alvarez arrived in his dressing room at the MGM Grand Garden Arena in Las Vegas on Saturday, November 2, at **6:35 p.m.** Eighteen camp members wearing matching navy-blue tracksuits with white-and-lime trim were with him.

The room had industrial carpet and cinder block walls painted ivory white. Two black sofas and 14 cushioned folding chairs were spread about. A large flat-screen television mounted on the far wall faced a 6-by-12-foot Mexican flag.

Ryan Garcia, who would fight Romero Duno for a minor WBC title in the next-to-last bout of the evening, was already there. Garcia was sharing the dressing room with Canelo because Eddy Reynoso trained both men. The two fighters greeted each other warmly.

A rectangular table had been set short end against the wall to create a small alcove in front of the television. Canelo settled in the alcove on a folding chair opposite the TV. Chepo Reynoso, who has overseen Canelo's growth as a fighter from the day that he first walked into a boxing gym, sat beside him.

Garcia turned off his music in deference to the champion. It was Canelo's room now.

At **7 o'clock,** Shane Mosley came in to wish Canelo well. Mosley turned pro in 1993 and blazed through the lightweight division before moving up in weight to conquer Oscar De La Hoya at 147 pounds. Then came the fall. In Shane's last 22 fights, he suffered 10 losses – an all-too-common endgame for a once-great fighter. One of Mosley's losses was a lopsided decision defeat to Canelo.

Garcia started warming up.

Canelo watched as a bloody bout between Seniesa Estrada and Marlen Esparza unfolded on the television. In Round 5, Esparza suffered a horrible gash on her forehead from an accidental headbutt. With each round, it worsened. The conventional wisdom in boxing is that a cut on the forehead shouldn't stop a fight. Here, the conventional wisdom was wrong. Esparza had been cut to the bone. But for reasons unknown, referee Robert Byrd, the ring doctor assigned to Esparza's corner, and Esparza's seconds let the fight continue. Canelo and Chepo shook their heads.

At **7:35,** Nevada State Athletic Commission Executive Director Bob Bennett entered with referee Russell Mora and assorted dignitaries who listened as Mora gave Canelo pre-fight instructions.

The thud of Ryan Garcia hitting the pads with Eddy Reynoso resonated throughout the room.

The bloody mask that was Marlen Esparza's face grew bloodier.

Eddy began wrapping Canelo's hands.

Finally, after nine rounds, Estrada-Esparza was stopped. Canelo nodded approvingly. There was no reason for it to have gone on that long.

At **8 o'clock,** Dan Bilzerian (an actor, internet personality and professional poker player) was escorted into the room to meet Canelo. The fighter rose to shake hands and, after Bilzerian left, returned to the chair he'd been sitting on for the past 90 minutes.

A cape was draped over Ryan Garcia's shoulders as he readied to leave for the ring.

"Looking good," Canelo exhorted.

Then Canelo's 2-year-old daughter (Maria Fernanda) and infant son (Adiel) were brought into the room.

"Papa!" Maria Fernanda cried out as she rushed toward him.

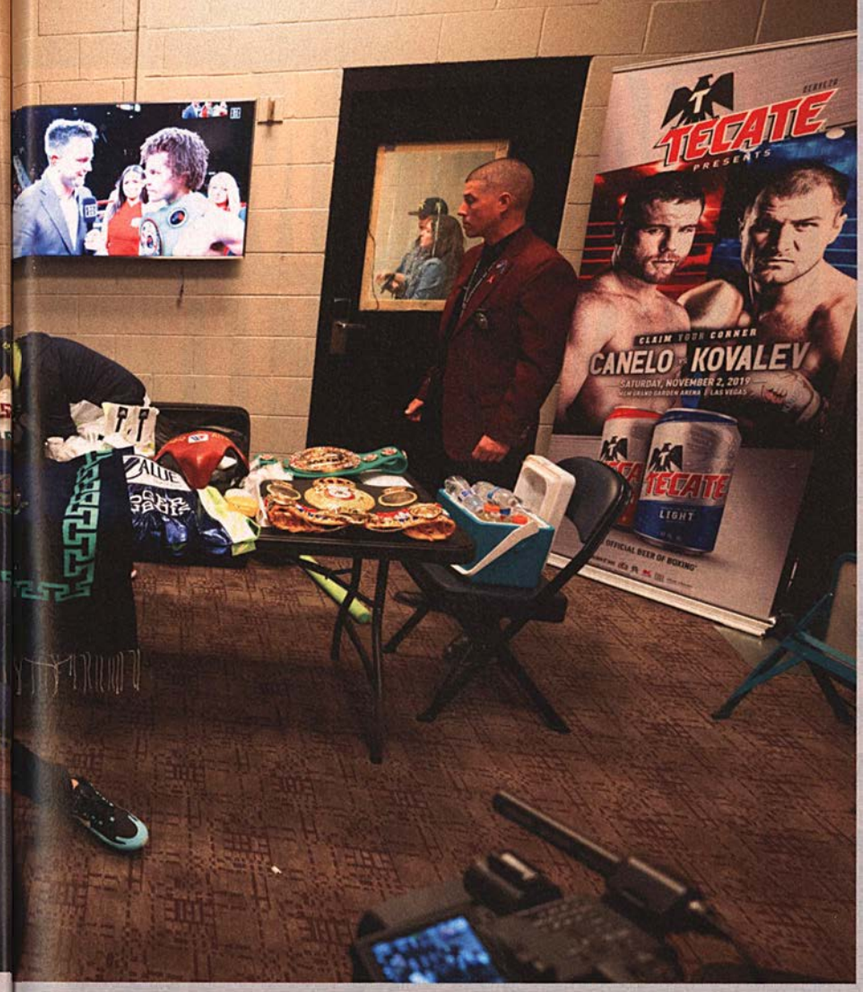
Father and daughter embraced.

Then Maria Fernanda examined her father's hands and announced that she wanted her hands to look like papa's.

Canelo put a strip of tape on the back of her hand.

Maria Fernanda informed him that this was unsatisfactory. She wanted the real thing. So on a night when his place in boxing history hung in the balance, Canelo Alvarez took gauze and tape and elaborately wrapped his daughter's hands.

6:35



Canelo Alvarez settled into his dressing room inside the MGM Grand's Garden Arena three and a half hours before walking to the ring for the evening's main event.

"This is not a distraction," he explained. "It is motivation. Having my children here reminds me of what I am fighting for."

Almost unnoticed, Ryan Garcia left the room with Eddy Reynoso at his side for what was expected to be the biggest challenge of his ring career.

Maria Fernanda, her hands now properly wrapped, began an impromptu dance recital for her father.

At **8:25,** Canelo lay down on the floor for a series of stretching exercises, his first physical boxing-related activity of the evening. Maria Fernanda climbed on top of his chest and kissed him. Then, while physical conditioner Munir Somoya stretched Canelo's legs one at a time, she simultaneously tugged on the other.

A loud "OOOH!" resounded through the room. Ryan Garcia had scored a devastating first-round knockout.

Canelo stopped stretching and looked at the television to watch a video replay of the knockout … Jab, straight right, left hook. KO at 1:38 of Round 1.

Three minutes later, Eddy was back in the dressing room. Garcia was still being interviewed in the ring.

Eddy gloved Canelo up.

Garcia returned and Canelo embraced him. Minutes later, Duane Ford (president of the WBC North American Boxing Federation) came in and told Garcia that the belt he'd just won had to be returned to Duno.

"The WBC will mail you a new one next week," Ford explained. "This one belongs to him. If you want to present it to him personally, come with me."

Garcia left the room with Ford and returned alone minutes later.

"That was hard to see," Ryan said. "In the ring, you do what you do. But just now, Duno was crying. I felt bad for him."

Canelo paced back and forth, stopping occasionally to rotate his torso.

Then absurdity set in.

It was **9:05 p.m.** Team Canelo had been told to be ready to walk by 9:15. But earlier in the week, DAZN had made the decision to delay the start of Canelo-Kovalev until after the conclusion of a UFC pay-per-view card that was being contested in New York. Thus, there would be an unconscionably long delay between the end of Garcia-Duno and the start of Canelo-Kovalev, which would ultimately begin at **10:18 p.m.** (1:18 a.m. Eastern Time).

That was insulting to fans who had traveled to Las Vegas and bought tickets for Canelo-Kovalev. It was off-putting to DAZN's East Coast subscribers (Canelo-Kovalev didn't end until after 2 a.m. Eastern Time). And it was both disrespectful and grossly unfair to Canelo and Kovalev.

The delay was more compatible with the rhythms of Canelo's dressing room than it would have been for most fighters. There's very little physical exertion on his part in the hours before a fight, and he seems immune to tension. If anything, during the next hour, he got a bit bored; that's all. He chatted with Chepo and Eddy, watched DAZN's filler content on the television and rose occasionally to shadowbox.

Finally, at **9:52,** DAZN production coordinator Tami Cotel came into the room and announced, "You walk in 11 minutes."

Canelo hit the pads with Eddy … Ferociously … With power … Now he looked like a fighter. A tattoo in English on the left side of his upper back read, "Destiny is not a matter of chance. It's a matter of choice. Life is hard but never give up. Keep on trying and always believe in yourself to achieve your dreams."

Inside the arena, three national anthems – Russia, Mexico and the United States – were sung.

Eddy massaged Canelo's shoulders while the Mexican anthem sounded.

Chepo draped a serape over Canelo's shoulders.

At **10:08,** Canelo left the sanctuary of his dressing room for war.

Thomas Hauser's email address is thomashauserwriter@gmail.com. His most recent book – A Dangerous Journey: Another Year Inside Boxing – was published by the University of Arkansas Press. In 2004, the Boxing Writers Association of America honored Hauser with the Nat Fleischer Award for career excellence in boxing journalism.

MOMENT OF TRUTH

AN INSIDE LOOK AT LIGHTWEIGHT CONTENDER RYAN GARCIA'S LAS VEGAS FIGHT WEEK

Written and Photographed By **Sye Williams**

I met Ryan Garcia a few years ago at a press conference. He was still a teenager at the time, maybe still in high school, and very low on the undercard. A familiar face at the media event, broadcaster Beto Duran, told me Golden Boy Promotions was very high on Garcia but the jury was still out on how good he really was.

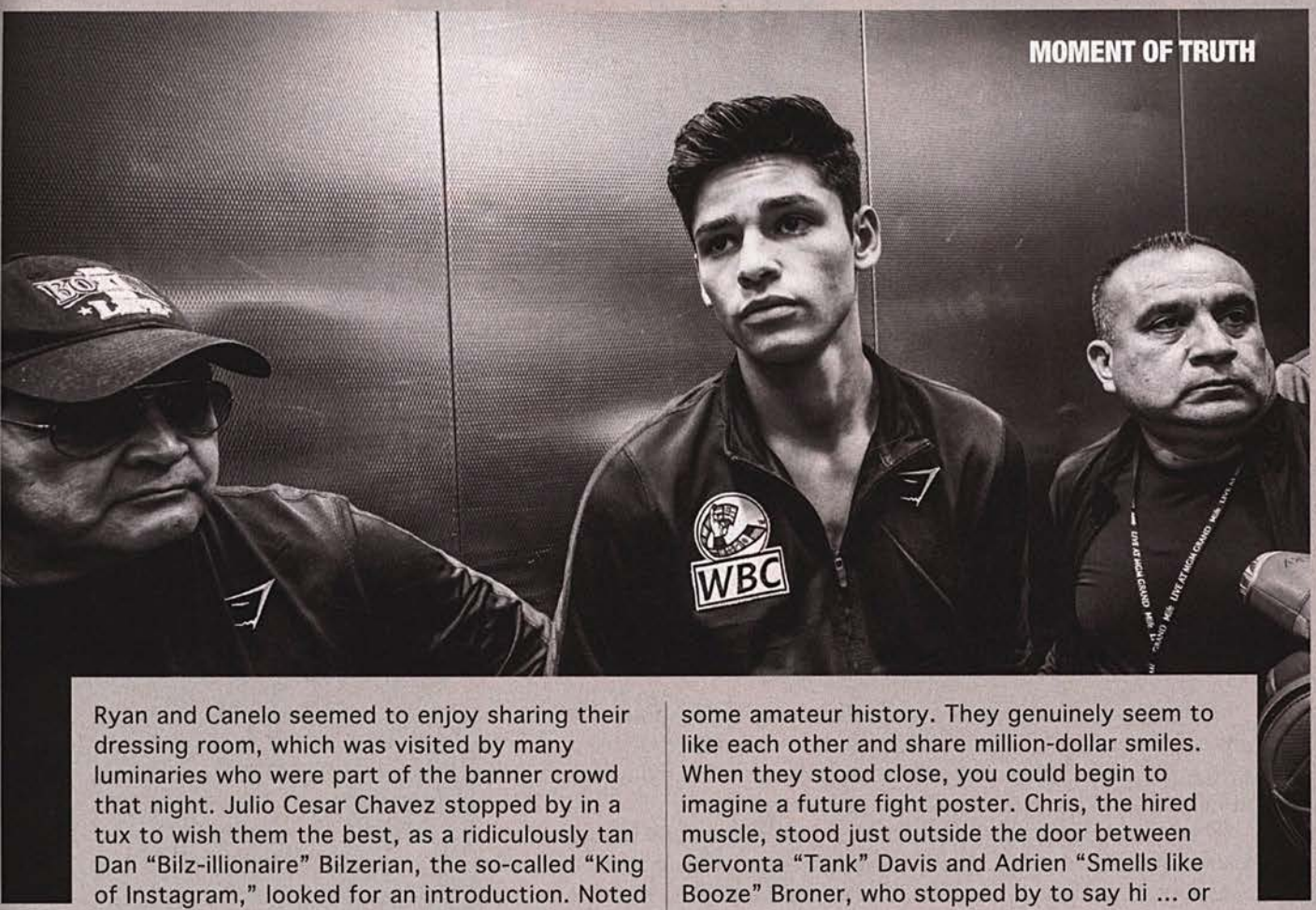
After watching him fight I could see why some fans had their doubts, and, honestly, I would be lying if I said I didn't have my own. He had the confidence and charisma of a seasoned world champion and phenomenal hand speed, but I was concerned that he let opponents walk in too close while carrying his head too high. I thought he had a bad habit of not blocking overhand rights, too.

But he was entertaining, and different from most boxers in that he had a social media presence that was fun to follow. It didn't take long before I was swept up in the "King Ry" frenzy, and I offered up my services as a photographer.

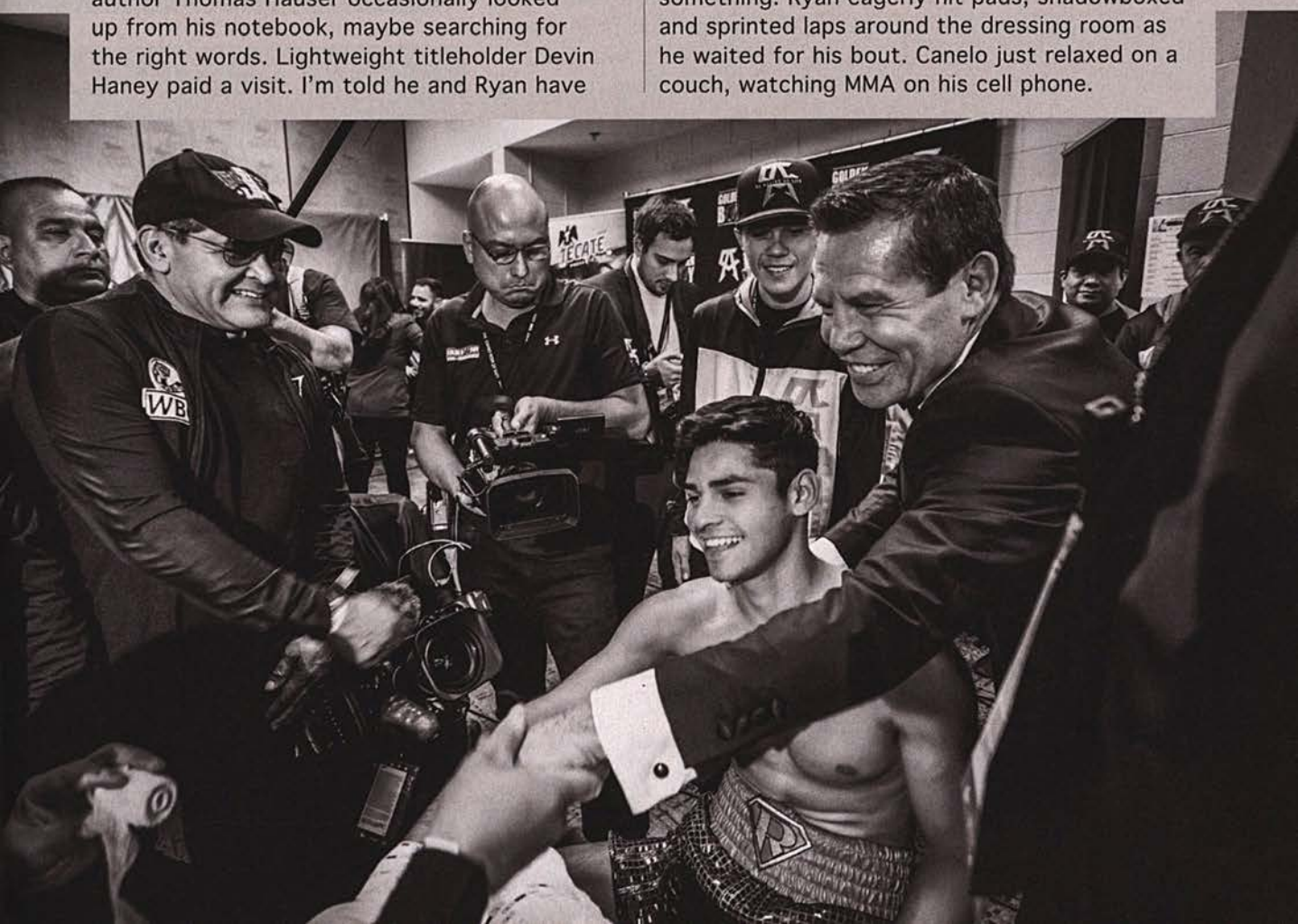
It was going to be an interesting journey. Would he seek to protect his flaws, as some fighters do throughout their entire career, or would he try to correct them? And if he didn't correct them, would his existing attributes be enough? Late in 2018, he began working with Canelo Alvarez's trainer, Eddy Reynoso, and at 21 years of age, after just a few fights, I think he's developed at a remarkable rate. His fight with Romero Duno, the co-feature to the Canelo-Sergey Kovalev fight at MGM Grand in Las Vegas, was his proving ground as a prizefighter and a budding star. The photos presented here represent my perspective with Team Garcia during the fight week and Ryan's moment of truth in the ring.

Ryan is a mad workaholic when it comes to his social media presence, and there is a method to his madness. Every time I look, he's picked up half a million followers. He has multiple Instagram accounts, multiple platforms, multiple phones, and he posts like clockwork, always at peak times during the day. He probably pays attention to moon phases. I post nude bodies, even dead bodies, and can barely eke out 3,000 followers @syewilliamsthesequel.

I've followed Ryan for a few years and was used to seeing him surrounded by fans as he left the ring following shows or made his slow walk through the casino to the adjoining host hotel lobby at Fantasy Springs in Indio, California. But it was different at the MGM Grand. This wasn't a gaggle of girls wearing T-shirts with his face on them. This was a large group of serious journalists with relentless questions about his ability and his credibility.

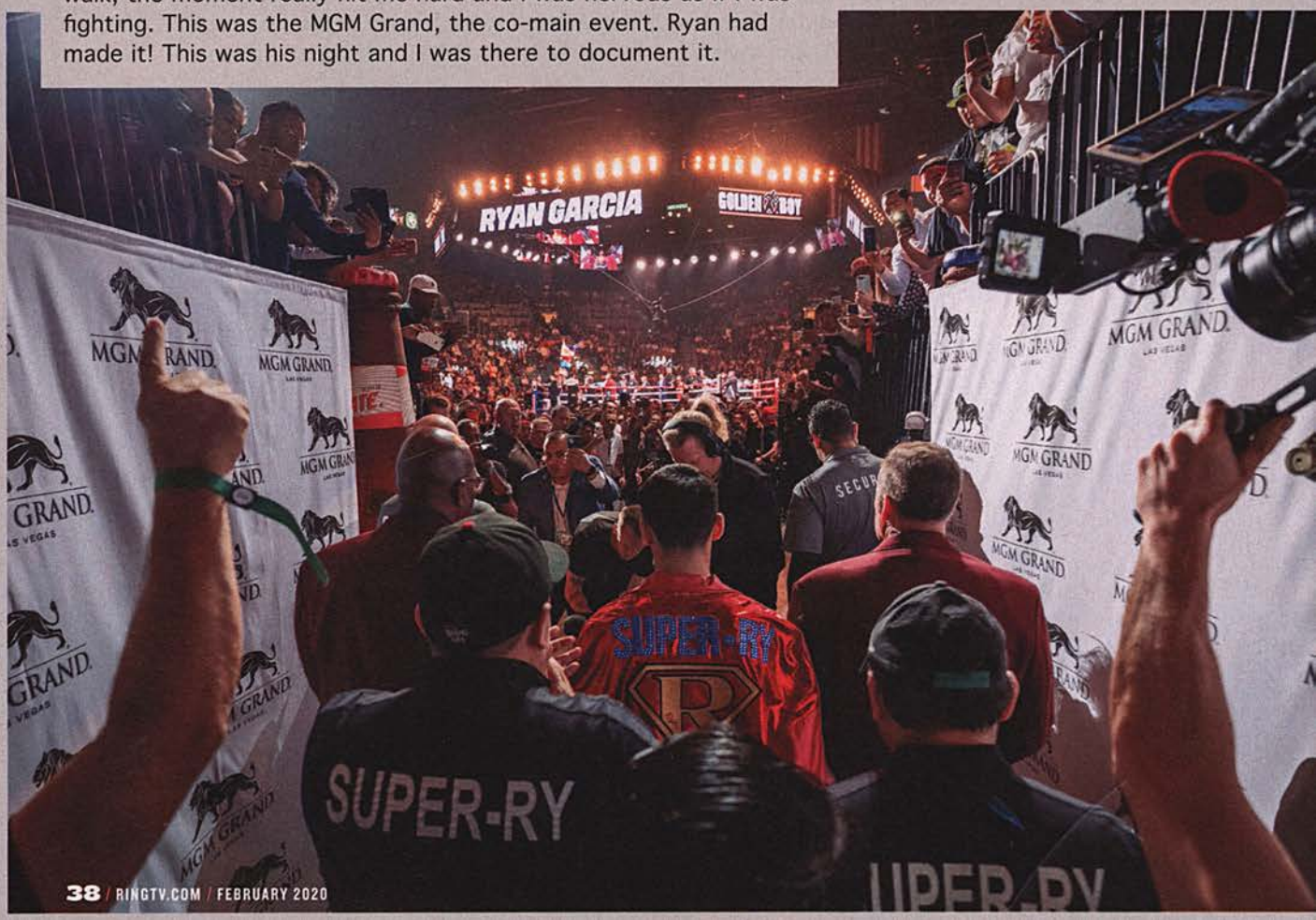


Ryan and Canelo seemed to enjoy sharing their dressing room, which was visited by many luminaries who were part of the banner crowd that night. Julio Cesar Chavez stopped by in a tux to wish them the best, as a ridiculously tan Dan "Bilz-illionaire" Bilzerian, the so-called "King of Instagram," looked for an introduction. Noted author Thomas Hauser occasionally looked up from his notebook, maybe searching for the right words. Lightweight titleholder Devin Haney paid a visit. I'm told he and Ryan have some amateur history. They genuinely seem to like each other and share million-dollar smiles. When they stood close, you could begin to imagine a future fight poster. Chris, the hired muscle, stood just outside the door between Gervonta "Tank" Davis and Adrien "Smells like Booze" Broner, who stopped by to say hi ... or something. Ryan eagerly hit pads, shadowboxed and sprinted laps around the dressing room as he waited for his bout. Canelo just relaxed on a couch, watching MMA on his cell phone.

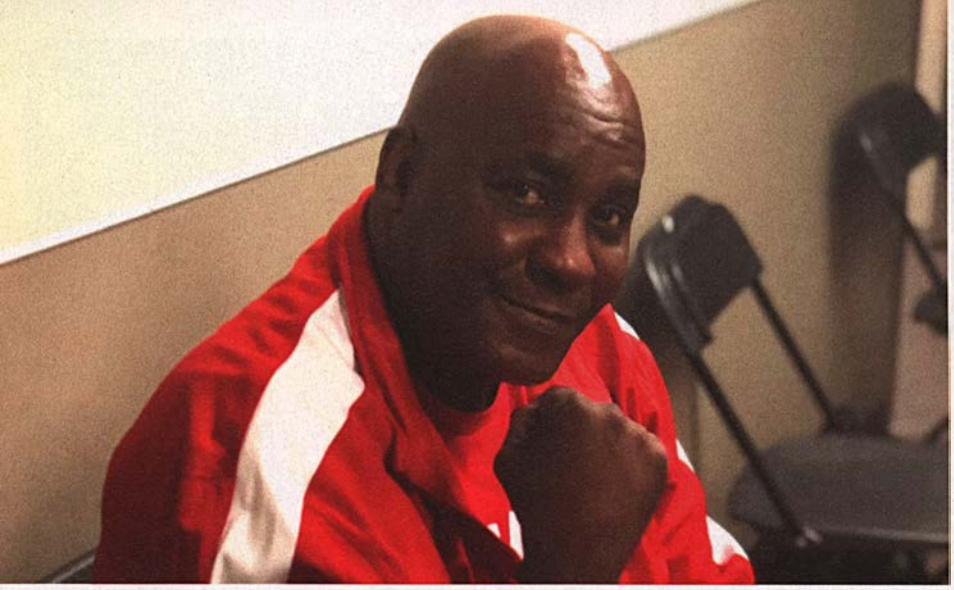


The fight week buildup to the Duno fight was a slow burn. There were the official arrivals on Tuesday, the media workouts on Wednesday, the undercard press conference on Thursday, the weigh-in on Friday and a whole lot of waiting.

When we finally walked down the long hallway to the Grand Arena on Saturday night and stopped at the mouth of the entrance, I was in awe. As we stood there, facing the ring from a distance, waiting for DAZN to give us the go to make that walk, the moment really hit me hard and I was nervous as if I was fighting. This was the MGM Grand, the co-main event. Ryan had made it! This was his night and I was there to document it.



I used to make jokes with Ryan before his fights and request the side of the ring he should KO his opponents so I could get the perfect photo. That night it took him one minute and 48 seconds to practically dispatch Duno into my lap, quieting all of his critics, including myself. RING



McCallum won world titles at junior middleweight, middleweight and light heavyweight.

MIKE MCCALLUM: GREATEST HITS

WITH SKILLS THAT GARNERED TITLES IN THREE WEIGHT CLASSES, IT'S NO WONDER 'THE BODYSNATCHER' WAS AVOIDED BY SO MANY FIGHTERS OF HIS TIME

By **Anson Wainwright**

Mike McCallum fought his way out of obscurity in Jamaica to the top of the boxing world. However, for much of his career, the highly skilled boxer-puncher was deemed too much risk versus not enough reward and was one of the most avoided fighters of his era.

McCallum was born in Kingston, Jamaica, on December 7, 1956. He was an only child and enjoyed life on the island before finding boxing at 15 years old.

"I went to church every Sunday with my mom and dad," McCallum told The Ring about his early years. "I went to school and I came home, played around with the other kids.

"I got into a few fights, and one time I went to a boxing club in the neighborhood that was well-known in Jamaica. I started throwing punches. I didn't know anything about boxing. One guy said, 'Mike, do you see that? You're natural.'"

McCallum went on to become a decorated amateur. He represented his country at the 1974 World Championships and 1976 Olympics and won gold at the Commonwealth Games in 1978. He hoped to go the 1980 Olympics, but those aspirations were cut short due to appendicitis. He posted an impressive 240-10 amateur record before turning professional in early 1981.

The legendary duo of George Benton and Eddie Futch helped fine-tune McCallum from there. "They were both geniuses," he said.

McCallum marched to 21 straight wins before meeting Sean Mannion for the vacant WBA junior middleweight title on the undercard of Marvin Hagler-Mustafa Hamsho in the fall of 1984. McCallum boxed superbly and won a unanimous decision. He would defend the title six times against the likes of David Braxton (TKO 8), Julian Jackson (TKO 2) and Donald Curry (KO 5).

"The Bodysnatcher" hoped he could lure one of the Fab Four (Hagler, Sugar Ray Leonard, Thomas Hearns and Roberto Duran) into facing him, but to no avail.

"I don't think; I know," he said when asked if he felt he was avoided. "I made a big mistake. I went to train with Emanuel Steward, Thomas Hearns, Milton McCrory and all them guys. I fought Braxton, McCrory and sparred Thomas Hearns. They knew how good I was and didn't want to fight me or spar me (afterward)."

McCallum abdicated his throne and stepped up to middleweight, heading straight to Italy to face Sumbu Kalambay for the WBA crown in March 1988. Although McCallum was the pre-fight betting favorite, he was unable to get a handle on Kalambay, a stick-and-move specialist, and lost for the first time.

Undeterred, McCallum got back to winning while waiting for his next opportunity. It came when Kalambay was stripped for facing Michael Nunn over mandatory challenger Herol Graham, who instead faced McCallum for the vacant title. McCallum won a hard-fought split decision to become a two-weight titleholder. He then bested Steve Collins (UD 12) and knocked out Michael Watson before exacting revenge on Kalambay via split decision.

Attempting to gain the IBF middleweight title, McCallum fought rising star James Toney twice in the early 1990s, and although both fights were close, the 35-year-old veteran drew and lost a majority decision. McCallum became a three-weight titleholder when he edged Jeff Harding for the WBC light heavyweight belt in the summer of 1994 and made one successful defense before losing his title to Fabrice Tiozzo.

In his two final bouts, McCallum lost a unanimous decision to a prime Roy Jones Jr. as well as the rubber match against Toney before retiring at the age of 40. He walked away with a record of 49-5-1 (36 KOs). He was inducted into the International Boxing Hall of Fame in 2003.

McCallum, now 62, lives in Las Vegas, where he is a key figure in the training camp of rising lightweight star Devin Haney. Here's what he had to say about six of his most memorable nights in the ring:

SEAN MANNION

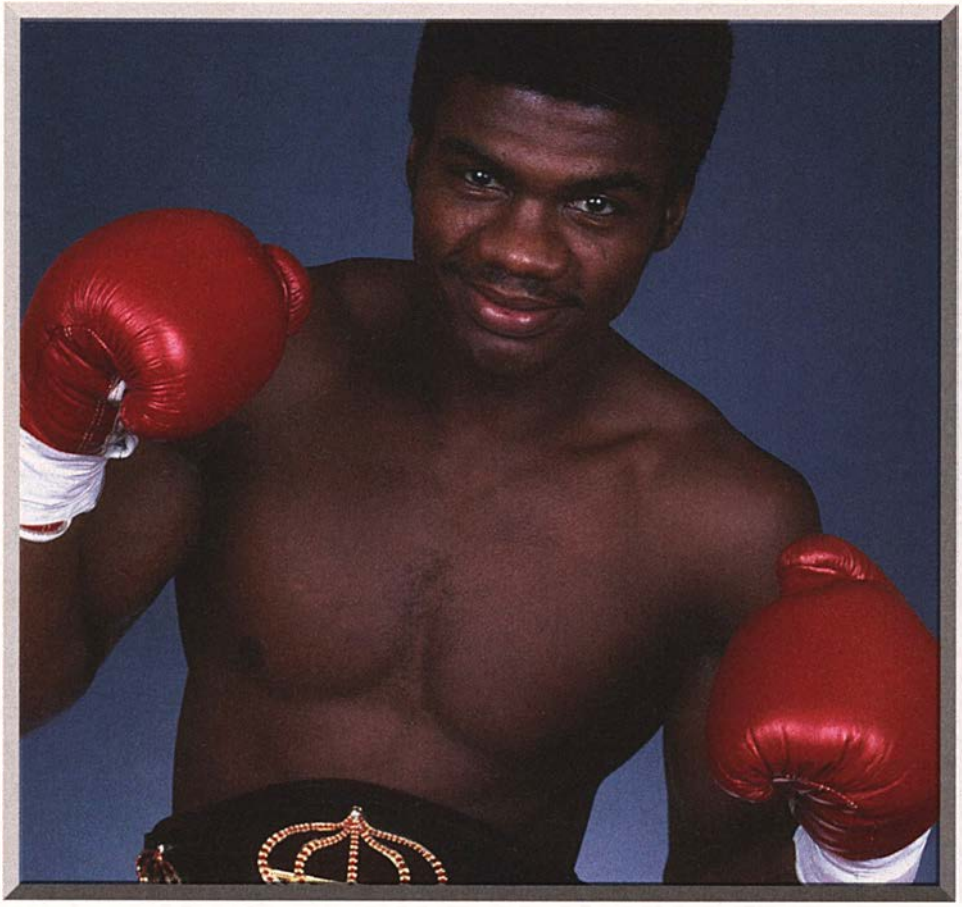
October 19, 1984, Madison Square Garden, New York • Titles: WBA junior middleweight

"I keep asking myself why (Leonard, Hagler, Hearns and Duran) didn't fight me. I have no answer. If they had fought me, it would have been the Fab Five. It was very frustrating. I was mad at everybody. I didn't want to see nobody. I didn't want to talk to anybody. Why didn't they want to fight me? I couldn't answer the question. Thomas Hearns didn't want to fight me. Leonard was the one I really wanted to fight, but he was a lighter weight class than me. With Duran, I was the number one contender – he should definitely have fought me, but he gave away the belt (to fight Thomas Hearns for the WBC title). I don't know why Hagler didn't want to fight me. I know those fights would be great fights.

"I was upset I didn't fight Duran, but now I've got to take care of business with Mannion. He didn't look like much, but he was game. When I hit him with some good shots, he came right back; he tried his best to win, but I had too much stuff going on. I did everything in my power to win the title. Mannion was a good fighter. I tried to knock him out and I couldn't. I controlled most of the fight and won most of the rounds. I would have been happy if I'd knocked him out, but I just wanted to win the title.

"You can't imagine (what it was like to be) the first Jamaican world champion. That means everything to me. That was the best feeling to know that you are the first world champion boxer in Jamaica. We had some great fighters from Jamaica back in the day – Bunny Grant, Percy Hayles, Roy Goss – a lot of good fighters. I celebrated. I went all over Jamaica in a car – everybody was coming out, everybody wanted to see me. It was something else."

RESULT: MCCALLUM UD 15

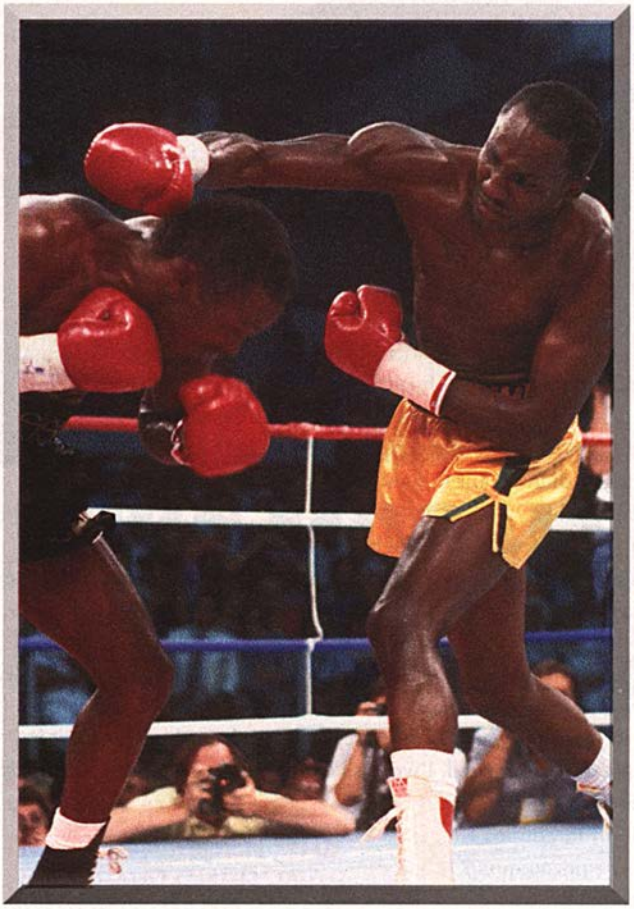


JULIAN JACKSON

August 23, 1986, Convention Center, Miami Beach, Florida • Titles: WBA junior middleweight

"I didn't know what to think. I knew he was a big puncher, but you don't feel a punch like that. I wasn't worried about his power; I was *concerned* about it – I didn't want to get hit by it at all. I felt his power. 'Oh yeah,' I thought, 'I have to get him before he gets me.' So I hit him first. He hit me with a shot, and I felt it: 'This boy can hit.' When I hit him with a shot, he went down. I said, 'You hit me so hard and you can't take a shot? I'm going to get you now.' He could give it, but he couldn't take it. It was all over."

RESULT: MCCALLUM TKO 2

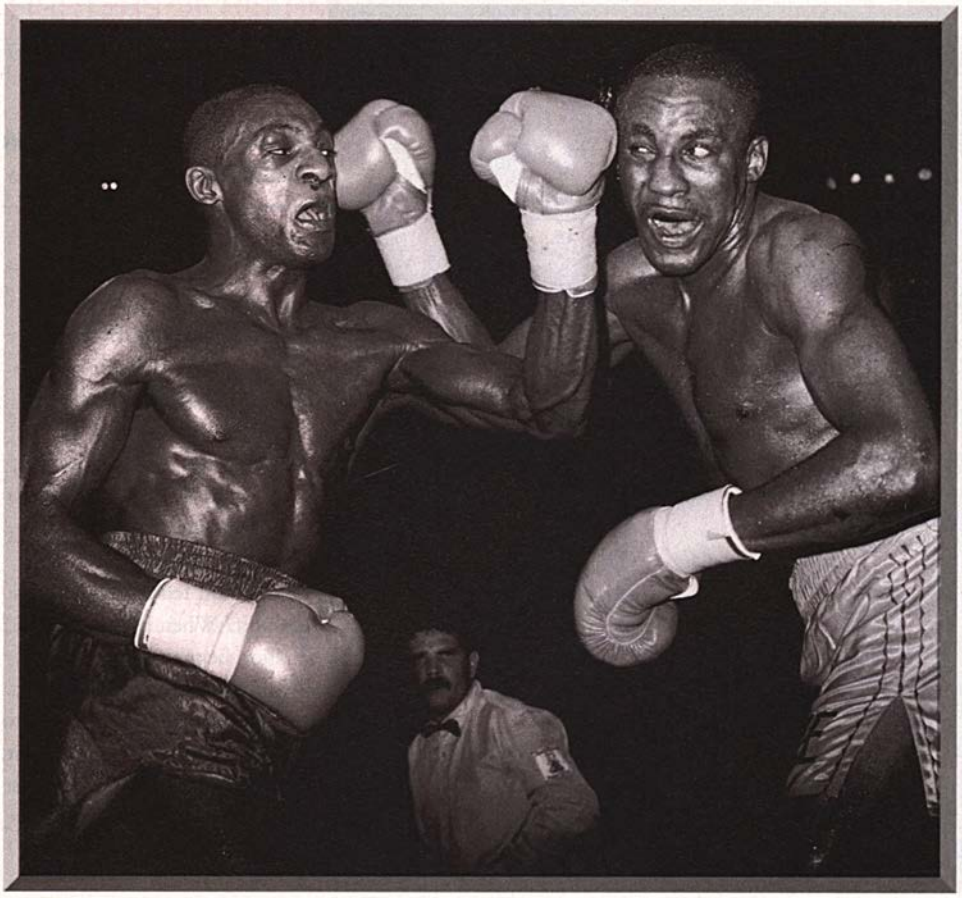


DONALD CURRY

July 18, 1987, Caesars Palace Sports Pavilion, Las Vegas • Titles: WBA junior middleweight

"I think (my best weight class was) junior middleweight. It was a great fight. Donald Curry was the kind of guy … you sit and watch and you have your own vision; you talk to yourself: How could I beat him? What would I have to do to beat him? George Benton was a great trainer; he put it all together and told me what to do to win. Curry was a very sharp fighter. He punches sharp and crisp. He's a very dangerous guy. He thinks a lot. He sets things up nicely. And I said, 'I've got to beat him at his own game.' He tries to set me up and I'm gonna set him up too. That was one of the best knockouts I ever had – it was a great knockout, a great fighter and a great fight. The last week of the workout, George Benton came to me and said, 'He's going to try to set you up with the right hand and jab; you've got to look out for them. He's very quick and very accurate. You've got to do it this way and come back on top.' I went over it one or two times, same combination. He said, 'Remember, Mike, you've got to be alert because he's very quick and accurate and he's dangerous.' So I slipped the jab and slipped his right hand, and I countered with a right uppercut and hook. That's all it takes. That's all I needed. I felt it in my hand."

RESULT: MCCALLUM KO 5

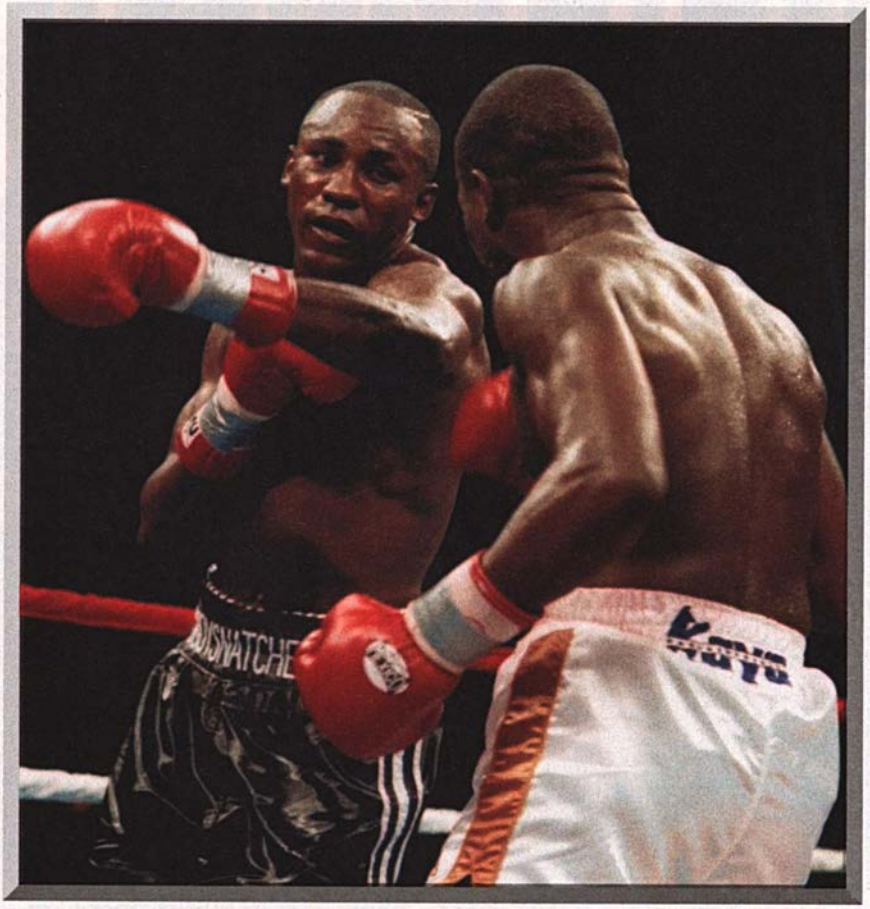


HEROL GRAHAM

May 10, 1989, Royal Albert Hall, London • Titles: WBA middleweight

"England is a rough place to fight, especially when you're fighting their man. They're singing songs; they expect their man to win. I knew he was a very awkward fighter, a southpaw and gives all kinds of movement, so I hit him to the body to slow him down. (Graham was) not easy to fight at all. He was very good; he dodged punches good, very slick. Herol Graham was something else. He was hard to hit because he moves very well. He was unorthodox. It was a tough fight for me. I had to catch up with him, but I did catch up with him and I beat him."

RESULT: MCCALLUM SD 12

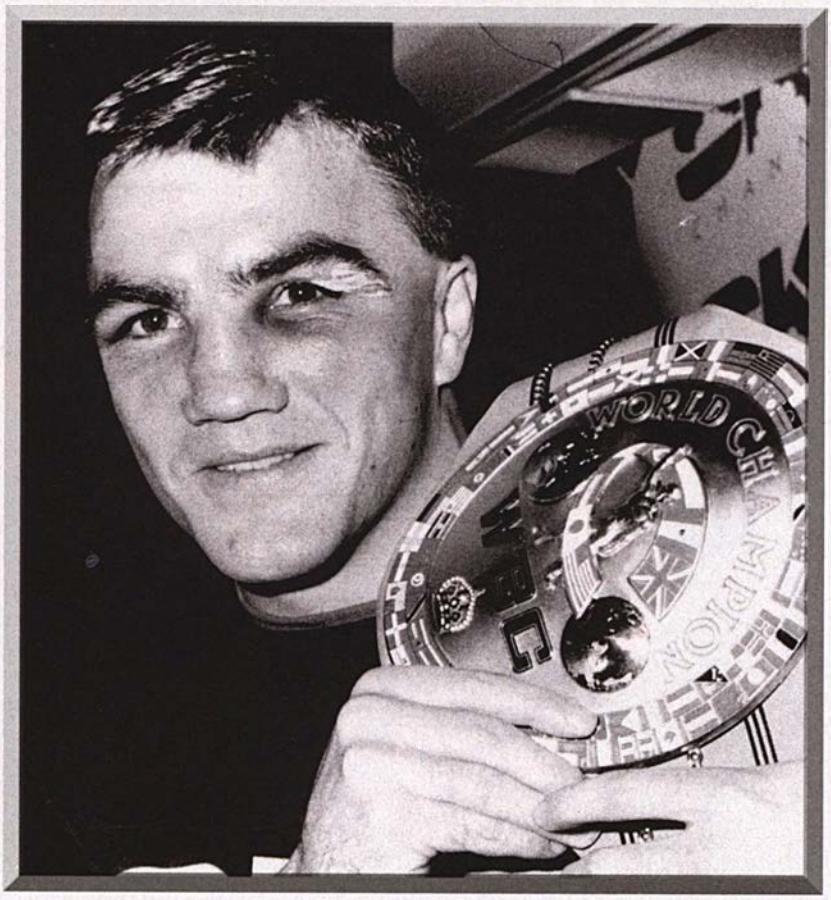


JAMES TONEY

December 13, 1991, Convention Hall, Atlantic City, New Jersey • Titles: IBF middleweight

"The WBA wanted $30,000 plus a $35,000 exemption fee for fighting Toney. My lawyer, Milton Chwasky, was going to go along with that, but then they came back and demanded we give (Steve) Collins another $50,000 to step aside, and we said no. They wanted too much money. I didn't know exactly what was going on. (Note: McCallum was stripped of the title.) I think I did enough to win the fight. It was a good fight, an old-school fight, very tough. I got off to a good start and he came back, and we went back and forth. The first fight was a close fight. He was young and strong and got better the second fight. He was a good fighter – three good fights. I think I won at least one or two fights. He was a throwback."

RESULT: DRAW



JEFF HARDING

July 23, 1994, Civic Center, Bismarck, North Dakota • Titles: WBC light heavyweight

"That fight was a great fight. I knew Jeff was a very hard fight to win – he keeps coming and he keeps punching. He's got good stamina, very strong, so I knew it was gonna be a hell of a fight. I've got to box him. I can't fight with him inside, 'cause he throws a lot of punches; he doesn't stop punching. I can't outwork him because he doesn't stop punching. I asked myself, 'How am I going to win this fight?' I've got to do both: I've got to box him sometimes, I've got to work inside sometimes. I've got to turn him and counterpunch him. So that's what I did. It meant everything to me – three-weight world champion. I was very happy about that. I worked hard. I trained hard for fights and I tried hard to win fights. I don't like to lose. I work hard all the time for fights, especially the championship fights. Those ones mean everything to me."

RESULT: MCCALLUM UD 12

WORLD BOXING SUPER SURREAL

AFTER TWO SEASONS OF PRODUCING UNFORGETTABLE FIGHTS, **THE WORLD BOXING SUPER SERIES** HAS PROVEN ITSELF TO BE A BOON FOR FIGHTERS, FANS AND THE SPORT ITSELF

By **Tom Gray**

Referee Luis Pabon completed the 10-count and British star Callum Smith was the winner of the super middleweight final of the World Boxing Super Series via seventh-round knockout. A right-hand body shot, mixed into a powerful combination, had sucked the air from countryman George Groves' lungs and the unbeaten Smith had announced himself as the finest 168-pounder on the planet.

Jumping out of my press seat, I headed straight for former featherweight champion Prince Naseem Hamed at ringside. It had been arranged earlier in the evening that the charismatic Hall of Famer – acting as international ambassador for the WBSS – would present the winner with the Ring Magazine belt. The only problem was that Naz, amid the post-fight hysteria, had commenced an interview with IFLTV host Kugan Cassius. As my heart sank, Paul Smith, Callum's older brother, yelled at me over the top rope, "Tom, where's the belt?." All I could say – within earshot of Naz and Kugan – was, "I've given it to Naz, he's bringing it up!" Kugan sensed my predicament and allowed "The Prince" to carry out his duties.

The date was September 28, 2018, at the King Abdullah Sports City in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia. The locale was bizarre, the occasion surreal, the atmosphere unique and – while the heat during fight week was absolutely unbearable – the quality of the action was world class. There was nowhere else I'd rather be.

The Groves-Smith bout marked the end of season one in the WBSS. Two

months earlier, in Moscow, pound-for-pound entrant Aleksandr Usyk had prevailed in the cruiserweight tournament by outclassing Murat Gassiev over 12 rounds, gaining recognition as the undisputed champion at 200 pounds in the process. I was disappointed not to attend that event – a visa requirement derailing my last-minute plans – but the finals I've covered in season two – both Fight of the Year candidates – have more than made up for that. And that's underselling it.

Just shy of 15 months after Smith-Groves, a little before 1:30 a.m., I was seated inside the Tokyo Dome Hotel's Bar 2000, a swanky establishment with a 19-meter long bar and the expected abundance of neon. Through the enormous panes of glass behind the bar, one looked onto the Tokyo Dome, venue for arguably the most sensational and unforgettable prizefight of the modern era: Mike Tyson's upset defeat by Buster Douglas on February 11, 1990. Earlier that evening, Japan's latest world title bout hadn't taken place at the Tokyo Dome or ended in an upset, but it was certainly "sensational," certainly "unforgettable" and, like Tyson-Douglas, it was now part of this country's rich boxing history.

Dubbed "The Drama in Saitama," the bantamweight final of the WBSS took place at the Saitama Super Arena on Thursday, November 7. It was a unification showdown between Ring Magazine and IBF titleholder Naoya Inoue and WBA counterpart Nonito Donaire. The undefeated Inoue was a prohibitive favorite coming in, yet the great – albeit aging – Donaire took "The Monster" to the gates of hell and forced him to have a long look inside. Inoue was cut for the first time, hurt for the first time and tested to his very limits. The Japanese star, who floored his friendly rival with a body shot in the 11th, fought brilliantly and ultimately prevailed via 12-round unanimous decision, but he will never forget the name Nonito Donaire – ever.

I've covered the sport for several years and ventured to a host of boxing hotbeds. I've been in arenas when the likes of Mike Tyson, Oscar De La Hoya, Bernard Hopkins, Floyd Mayweather Jr., Manny Pacquiao, Joe Calzaghe, Canelo Alvarez, Gennady Golovkin and Vasiliy Lomachenko have done their thing. Regardless, Inoue vs. Donaire might very well be the finest world title bout I've ever seen live. It was that good.

"I thought it was one of the most brutal fights I've ever seen, but it was executed on such a high technical level," offered WBSS boss Kalle Sauerland as he awaited a food order inside Bar 2000. "It was more than boxing; for me it was an incredible test of character from both guys. Nonito had already shown character in his career, but with Inoue, we know so much more about him now. It feels like we found out everything about him tonight.

"Inoue will become a better fighter after what was really a 12-round education. Only a champion that has been through that type of war and banked that experience can know if they really have that inside. In terms of pound-for-pound lists, it's a subjective matter, but I said before that Inoue was pound-for-pound No. 1 and, for me, he cemented that tonight. He has checked the only box that wasn't checked – we know he can overcome adversity."

As well as great fights and pound-for-pound stars, the WBSS has been solely responsible for unifying key divisions and crowning Ring Magazine champions. Elite-level fighters are seeing their contemporaries achieve enormous levels of success in a very short period of time, and they're sure to want a piece of that. Could we see the very best fighters in the world

NAOKI FUKUDA

Inoue-Donaire is a 2019 Fight of the Year candidate.

pressuring their promoters into joining the WBSS?

"The brand is at an all-time high after tonight," said Sauerland, who was still beaming three hours after leaving his ringside position at Inoue-Donaire. "I don't bask in glory, but I enjoy when something works. And the thing is, this is such a simple recipe. It's the best versus the best. Just go through the fights that we've delivered in the first two seasons: Usyk and Briedis, (Yunier) Dorticos and Gassiev, (Josh) Taylor and (Regis) Prograis and Inoue-Donaire.

"The brand does not follow the traditional things a boxing promoter does in terms of promoting an event. With this brand, we just want the best. People have asked me if we'd do a heavyweight tournament with the other half of the division, the up-and-comers. I said, 'You know, it's not a bad concept, and as a promoter I'd love to do it, but it's just not what we stand for.' I'd rather take strawweight and get the best. I'm not gloating, but we can take any weight division now. We've shown that it doesn't matter what weight we do it at. You've just got to get the mix right."

The Inoue-Donaire classic came hot on the heels of another magical WBSS final. Less than two weeks earlier, the aforementioned Taylor-Prograis showdown had ended in a 12-round majority decision for Taylor in London. The super-skilled southpaw from Edinburgh, Scotland, emerged from the junior welterweight tournament with Ring Magazine, IBF and WBA titles as well as the WBSS' signature Muhammad Ali trophy. Like Inoue, Taylor came through a serious gut check to establish himself as the finest fighter in his division.

"I would like to have sparked him out and took no damage, but what I went through makes for a better story," Taylor told The Ring three-and-a-half weeks after his career-defining triumph. "I feel proud that I battled for it and came through adversity. I had one eye for those last three rounds, and even though you could argue that he won the last two, I was still very competitive. I couldn't see punches coming, but that makes for a great story, doesn't it? It's better for my legacy.

"The tournament was a blessing. I got a shot at a world title, won it, then I was straight into a unification. I got The Ring Magazine title and the Ali trophy on top of it. All of that in three fights is almost unheard of in boxing. Being involved in the WBSS concept has been brilliant, and it's great for the sport because it takes away all the shitty politics."

Taylor, as proud a Scotsman as you'll ever meet, came of age by outgunning Prograis before a largely English crowd that blew the lid off the O2 Arena for him. When it comes to sport, England rooting for Scotland is like Mexico rooting for Puerto Rico – it's rare. During the post-fight press conference, I reminded the Edinburgh man (or "the wee guy from Prestonpans," as he'd prefer me to call him) that he was the first Scotsman to unify world titles since fellow Edinburgh native Ken Buchanan in 1971. Taylor, who idolizes the former undisputed lightweight champion, looked close to tears as he tried to absorb the magnitude of what he'd achieved. Moments like that stay with you.

Back in Bar 2000, however, I was eager to find out how much the threat of litigation and lawsuits had taken out of the WBSS and its crew in recent months. Halfway through season two, international sports agency MP & Silva, which handled rights distribution for the WBSS, the French Open and Serie A, among

Taylor-Prograis crowned a new Ring Magazine 140-pound champion.

others, went into liquidation. It was the stuff of nightmares for Sauerland and his staff, and the monetary woes were compounded by lawsuits from tournament participants Ivan Baranchyk and Prograis, who threatened to pull out for financial reasons. And being that there's no news like bad news, a large section of the boxing media dutifully predicted the demise of the WBSS the moment the company encountered trouble.

"I don't pay too much attention to what people say," said Sauerland, who suddenly realized that his eyes were bigger than his stomach when he received enough food to satisfy four people. "We had to test ourselves with a very strong shareholding structure through public listed companies. I said, 'Well, we've told everyone; let's see what we're made of now!' We had an emergency board meeting so that we could work out a system to cope with this grenade exploding, and in the end, we did it. We pulled through. I think that experience made us stronger because we worked through it as a team.

"As for the lawsuits, whatever they say now, they tried to pull us over the table. But we sent a message to the boxing world with those two cases – 'Don't fuck with us!' What I said at the time was, 'If you're gonna have a go at me, don't come to a gunfight with a water pistol!' No, look, joking aside, it was macho talk, but we backed it up. Some of it was ridiculous; one (person) filed a lawsuit without a contract attached to it. It was scare tactics, because they think we've got a pot of gold and they can have something extra on top. That's normal, that's boxing, but it wasn't possible. We're not just gonna roll over. We're well-funded, but we also have to make this a business. We can't allow people not to comply with contracts that are well paid – and they are well paid."

The same way a fighter gains invaluable experience from being tested within their domain, a promoter does the same thing in business. Sauerland began his career in soccer and traversed into boxing through media rights. He's actually had two careers in the sport – one as a promoter for Sauerland Promotion and one as head of the WBSS. And in terms of tournaments, this isn't his first rodeo. The Showtime Super Six was also the brainchild of the gregarious 42-year-old, who banked plenty of experience from that 168-pound extravaganza.

"The Super Six was an extraordinary event at the time," said esteemed sportswriter Gareth Davies, who covered most of that event for The Telegraph between 2009 and 2011. "We had the emergence of three modern greats in the super middleweight division: Carl Froch, one of the greatest British boxers of the last 50 years; Mikkel Kessler, a brilliant exponent and ambassador for the sport; and Andre Ward, who arguably finished his career as the No. 1 fighter in the world, pound-for-pound.

"Even though The Super Six went on far too long and the (locations) could have been structured a bit better, the tournament format still worked brilliantly. Kalle learned from the mistakes. He knew the pitfalls. He knew there had been too many promoters around the table. I remember there was behind-the-scenes footage, which was very rare at that time, with literally six promoters and the organizers trying to work out how to do it. I think it's great that Kalle's at the helm now in terms of being the managing promoter.

"The WBSS has created several stars and given boxers who might not have ordinarily had resonance a clear platform to become well-known by the public. I also think the creation of four Ring Magazine champions is fantastic for the sport and creates a better template for the future. The WBSS has created superfights without promoters and television companies making us wait a year or two. It's taken away a bit of the angst that we go through waiting for things to happen."

In less than two weeks the World Boxing Super Series was responsible for two modern classics. Taylor-Prograis was special, and anyone lucky enough to be in Saitama had the boxing experience of a lifetime. Taking out my deplorable use of chopsticks and the embarrassment of not being able to locate toilet flushers on numerous occasions (don't laugh unless you've been there), I was in my element. Admittedly, I ventured to "The Land of the Rising Sun" expecting a virtuoso performance from Inoue, and I struggle to forgive myself for discounting Donaire, a fighter who I've admired immensely for many, many years. "The Filipino Flash" proved his greatness once again and, ultimately, fell just short against a younger version of himself. The fight was simply out of this world, and a TV replay will never do it justice.

The future is bright for Sauerland and the WBSS. Next up will be the cruiserweight final between Mairis Briedis and Yunier Dorticos, who will fight for Briedis' IBF title as well as the vacant Ring Magazine 200-pound title left behind by Usyk. That bout is likely to take place in Riga, Latvia, in the first quarter of 2020. Plans for a season three are already underway, and while there may be some structural changes, fans can expect the same hard-hitting and explosive action they've become accustomed to.

"I'll be looking at two weights," said Sauerland, who was now pleading for me to eat some pizza. "I've been homing in on the flyweights and the (junior bantamweights), maybe even a catchweight between the two. Then there's the middleweights, because Canelo's not a middleweight anymore. I don't think he'd make middleweight now. The females at the lighter weights are definitely on my radar. And the heavyweight situation is one that we're going to monitor. People talk about the money, but let me worry about the money. I can see a model, potentially, where you could do that; maybe not for season three, but further down the line.

"Right now, we're working on the timeline, because I'm not happy with it at the moment. We're considering bringing in a qualification system. You'd pick your seeds – a couple of world champions and a couple of interesting characters. From there, you'd leave four spots open and let fighters compete for those four spots. So, do we delay the beginning of season three, push it back a bit and do the qualifiers to get the timeline right? I'll need to sit down with DAZN, our broadcasters in the States, and get their feedback as well."

The backing of DAZN has been huge for the WBSS, and its involvement is long-term. Television exposure in the U.K. has been erratic, but as long as the events are being picked up, that's the most important thing. In terms of its modus operandi, The Ring fully endorses what the WBSS is striving for. In an age where the term "champion" is constantly being diluted by a multitude of world title belts, The Ring and the WBSS are in the same line of business. A champion should prove superiority over the field – a champion should be singular.

Tom Gray is Associate Editor for Ring Magazine. Follow him on Twitter: @Tom_Gray_Boxing

VENUM
MSA

TIME TO WAKE UP, TIME TO LOOK IN THE MIRROR

WITH FIVE FATALITIES IN 2019, BOXING IS ONCE AGAIN FACED WITH THE URGENT QUESTION OF HOW TO PROTECT FIGHTERS AS MUCH AS POSSIBLE

By **Michael Montero**

Boxing always has been, and always will be, a very dangerous sport.

For decades, serious injuries and even ring fatalities were simply considered part of the risks associated with professional pugilism. This sort of attitude was commonplace in other perilous sporting endeavors as well. In the 21st century, however, great strides have been made to improve health and safety standards in the global sporting realm.

A few years ago, the National Football League agreed to compensate thousands of retired players to the tune of over a billion dollars in what became known as the "NFL Concussion Settlement." Further, several changes were made to the game rules, training/practice standards and player equipment in attempts to limit concussions. After the death of auto racing superstar Dale Earnhardt at the 2001 Daytona 500, NASCAR began a series of changes aimed at driver safety. Upgrades were made to driver racing suits, car design and even the tracks. The results have been monumental, with zero deaths in the premier series of NASCAR since the Earnhardt tragedy.

Meanwhile, in 2019, five professional boxers died as a result of injuries suffered in the ring.

On July 19, Russian native Maxim Dadashev fought through 11 punishing rounds against powerful Puerto Rican Subriel Matias before trainer Buddy McGirt threw in the towel. Matias dominated down the stretch, and the junior welterweight title eliminator became a one-sided affair that many feel could have been stopped earlier. Moments after the bout ended, Dadashev struggled while leaving the ring and collapsed soon after. It took Maryland State Athletic Commission personnel several critical, and potentially lifesaving, minutes to get Dadashev secured on a stretcher and transported to a nearby hospital. After undergoing emergency brain surgery and being placed in a medically induced coma, he would die several days later.

That same week in Argentina, lightweight Hugo Santillán collapsed as the scorecards were read after 10 grueling rounds with Uruguayan Eduardo Javier Abreu. He too died in the hospital after undergoing brain surgery, having suffered multiple heart attacks in the process. A month prior, Santillán was dominated over the 10-round distance by Germany's Artem Harutyunyan in Hamburg. Subsequently, German officials placed Santillán on a medical suspension that his native Argentine commission – and his team – simply ignored. It's not just that Santillán fought only 35 days after a completely one-sided loss, it's that he had been training (which likely included plenty of sparring) in between.

In September, Bulgarian Boris Stanchov died after suffering a cardiac arrest in the fifth round of a junior lightweight bout in Albania. It was later revealed that he had been fighting illegally, using the boxing license and medical reports of his cousin. Stanchov's official record coming into the bout with local fighter Ardit Murja was 0-5. The fight, scheduled for six rounds, was a complete shutout. All three judges had it scored 40-36 for the Albanian before Stanchov collapsed.

In October, American junior middleweight Patrick Day was dominated and dropped three times by undefeated prospect Charles Conwell in Chicago. The third knockdown in the 10th round was particularly devastating, as the back of Day's head crashed loudly to the canvas, prompting referee Celestino Ruiz to immediately wave off the fight. Day was promptly rushed to Northwestern Memorial Hospital, where he suffered multiple seizures and fell into a coma. Once again, emergency brain surgery was performed, but it was too late. Day succumbed to his traumatic brain injuries four days later.

In November, Australian middleweight Dwight Ritchie died after sparring with fellow Aussie Michael Zerafa, who was preparing for his rematch with Jeff Horn, in Melbourne. It was described in media accounts as a "freak accident." Apparently, Ritchie was caught with a hard body shot, walked to his corner, collapsed and could not be revived. It is unknown what injuries or medical issues Ritchie may or may not have been carrying with him into training

The deaths of Maxim Dadashev (pictured opposite page) and Patrick Day rocked the boxing world, bringing the issue of boxer safety to the forefront in 2019.

that day.

Every ring fatality is unique but equally devastating to the boxing community. Fans, media and practitioners of sport are left with more questions than answers. This is nothing new. According to the records kept by the Manuel Valazquez Fatality Collection, over a thousand boxers around the world have died since the publication of the Marquess of Queensberry Rules in the late 19th century. Yet in the social media age, modern fight fans and younger media members are debating the fighter safety issue with an energy perhaps never before seen. It is a subject that I have become passionate about in recent years, particularly as it relates to Performance Enhancing Drugs (PEDs) testing. The discussion is a convoluted and uncomfortable one. After speaking with several members of the boxing community, what follows is a list of what is broken, what would help and what we should research further in regard to improving health and safety standards in the sweet science.

WHAT IS BROKEN

THE STATE REGULATION SYSTEM: Currently, boxing in the United States is governed at the state level, meaning that laws and safety standards vary from jurisdiction to jurisdiction. This often leads to situations where promoters "forum shop" risky fights and/or fighters with compromised medical histories to commissions with more lenient standards. Take the case of Julio Cesar Chavez Jr., who was set at press time to face Daniel Jacobs in Las Vegas on December 20. The Nevada State Athletic Commission (NSAC) is one of the few jurisdictions that conducts regular PEDs testing for fights scheduled in their state. On October 24, a collection agent from the Voluntary Anti-Doping Agency (VADA) arrived at the Wild Card Boxing Club in Hollywood, where Chavez was training, to collect a sample for testing. Chavez refused and was placed on suspension by NSAC executive director Bob Bennett.

Rather than scrapping the bout, promoter Eddie Hearn of Matchroom Boxing simply shopped it around to other commissions. Ultimately, the Arizona Boxing and MMA Commission agreed to take the fight and the event was relocated to Phoenix. VADA, respecting the suspension from the NSAC, declined to continue drug-testing responsibilities. It was taken over by a privately held, for-profit company named Drug Free Sport, which has been criticized for a low rate of positive tests and lack of effectiveness, and has even been accused of improperly handling drug tests for NFL players in the past. Given Chavez Jr.'s history of failed drug tests (he was fined and suspended by the NSAC after testing positive for a banned diuretic before his fight with Troy Rowland in 2009, and once again after testing positive for cannabis before his bout with Sergio Martinez in 2012), fans were reasonably hesitant to buy tickets. Yet Hearn reassured everyone that should Chavez fail a test, he would be replaced by Gabriel Rosado, and the show went forward with strong ticket sales. Rosado, meanwhile had lost seven of his last 12 fights going back to 2013.

"We need uniform health and safety standards across all 50 states, with or without government intervention," promoter Lou DiBella told The Ring. "Fighters who are in danger should not be able to forum shop, nor should promoters and managers be able to arrange dangerous fights by exploiting the lack of health and safety measures in many states. I know of countless examples where New York fighters (where DiBella is based) who couldn't get sanctioned for a fight in the state due to medicals were allowed to fight elsewhere."

Julio Cesar Chavez Jr. was suspended for evading a drug test by the Nevada commission, but his fight with Daniel Jacobs was moved to Arizona.

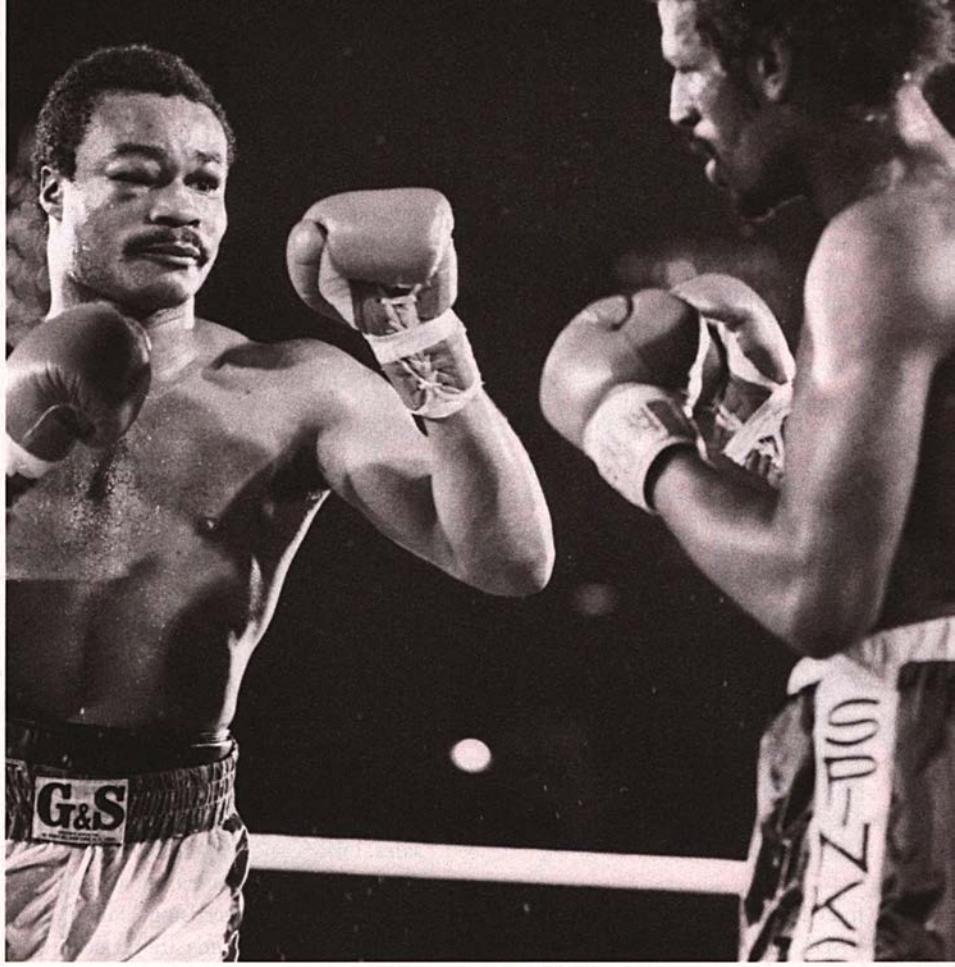
WEIGHT CUTTING:
In 1983, a rematch between Eddie Mustafa Muhammad and Michael Spinks was called off on the day of the fight when Muhammad did not make the light heavyweight division limit of 175 pounds. As a reaction, the powers that be moved fighter weigh-ins to the day before the bout. The official reason given was so fighters had more time to rehydrate and get proper rest and recovery before getting in the ring, which made sense. But it didn't take long for fighters to discover ways to boil down to unnatural weights for a competitive advantage. This issue has become worse in recent years with the explosion of the athletic supplements industry. Many fighters are using dangerous supplements to shed weight in an unhealthy way, dehydrating not only their body, but more importantly their brain. "Weight cutting is a horrible problem," said VADA president Margaret Goodman, "and I think we know the current system has been so bastardized that almost nobody fights in their true weight class."

It is becoming increasingly more common to see mismatches with "weight bully" scenarios, where one fighter rehydrates to well over the division limit in which they are fighting, often dwarfing their opponent on fight night. One commission official told us of a recent situation where a lightweight titleholder rehydrated nearly 23 pounds after hitting the scales, essentially entering the ring as a middleweight. Not only does that endanger the opponent, but also the fighter making such extreme changes in weight. "I have spoken with literally dozens of neurologists on this issue," DiBella said, "and they all tell me the same thing: The lack of sufficient water surrounding the brain exponentially increases the danger of fighter injury due to head blows."

CULTURE:
How often do we see a fighter being shut out on the cards, hanging on for nothing more than a moral victory in what has become a one-sided beating? The greatest fear of many fighters is being labeled a quitter. Boxing has a culture of "death before dishonor," and too often we see corners that are unwilling to protect their fighters from themselves. Bloodthirsty fans are not much help either, particularly in the social media age. If a referee stops a bout prematurely in the eyes of fans, he or she is lambasted on Twitter. When Sergey Kovalev was stopped in the 11th round of his November 2 bout with Canelo Alvarez, he was accused of taking a dive from some fans and even credentialed media. A sea of "fixed fight" videos from YouTubers followed.

Then we have the sparring issue, which stays under the radar for the most part. Ask any reporter on the beat and they'll tell you it is not uncommon to see a fighter who was just knocked out back at the gym training, even sparring, days later. "A 45-day suspension for someone that's been knocked out cold is insufficient," DiBella said. "In general, fighters are able to fight on the 46th day. That means they've been sparring, training and taking punishment when they should have been out of the gym completely. Trainers, managers and promoters must be held accountable." California State Athletic Commission (CSAC) Executive Director Andy Foster agrees. "A guy fights on Friday night and he's back in the gym training on Monday, sparring a few days later," he said. "It happens all the time. That's the industry, and that has to stop."

After Anthony Joshua was stopped by Andy Ruiz Jr. on June 1 in New York, rumors flew that he had been knocked out in sparring just a week or two prior to the bout. This is another common occurrence in boxing. Knockouts happen in sparring and generally go unreported. Fighters and their teams don't want to lose out on a payday, promoters don't want to refund tickets and networks don't want to cancel shows. How



The cancellation of the Eddie Mustafa Muhammad-Michael Spinks rematch led to previous-day weigh-ins.

many boxers have stepped into the ring on fight night having suffered a concussion in training? "This has been a major topic of discussion at our annual convention in recent years," World Boxing Council President Mauricio Sulaimán told The Ring. "We are currently working on a program to have monthly logs at every gym, where fighters have to report the number of rounds they sparred each day. Also, any knockouts in the gym must be reported the local commission."

WHAT WOULD HELP

THOROUGH YEAR-ROUND PEDS TESTING:

In 2016, the WBC partnered with VADA and rolled out the Clean Boxing Program (CBP), which made the top 15 WBC-rated fighters in each division subject to random year-round PEDs testing. The top five female fighters in each division were added to the program in 2019. The WBC deserves tremendous credit for this endeavor, but there are issues. The WBC currently funds VADA with a $13,000 monthly budget to conduct random testing at their discretion. Over 300 boxers are subject to the program, living and training all over the world. The costs associated with collecting samples, shipping them to the lab and then testing them vary and can be quite expensive. The current budget does not ensure fighters are tested often enough. In fact, many boxers enrolled in CBP are never tested at all throughout a calendar year. "To really do it right, I think an annual budget of over $1 million would be a great start," said Goodman. "Money could be generated through ticket sales. I think sponsors like the beer companies could contribute as well; it would be great advertising." Sulaimán agrees that more funds are needed. "We are trying to land sponsors, put on fundraisers and find other ways to increase funds for the program," he said.

The good news is that we are seeing more fighters enroll in full VADA testing at their own expense before a scheduled bout. That is, they agree to random testing, sometimes submitting dozens of samples of urine and/or blood in the process, from the moment they enroll through the night of their fight. VADA posts the names of fighters who have enrolled in their program on their website and social media. Fighters who take this extra step should be commended, but there is a loophole. "A month or so of VADA testing before a fight doesn't mean much," DiBella told The Ring. "In fact, cheaters are often the ones implementing the testing timelines in a way to give themselves cover."

YEAR-ROUND WEIGHT CHECKS:

"Weight is a boxer's number one enemy," Sulaimán said. "We have been trying to change this with education, guidance and updated procedures." Similar to their CBP program, the WBC has a weight management program for world title bouts. Fighters are required to do weight checks 30 days, 14 days and 7 days prior to a scheduled fight. They cannot be more than 10 percent over the division limit 30 days before their bout, 5 percent at 14 days and 3 percent at 7 days. On top of that, Sulaimán told us, "Fighters have to submit their current weight at the time of signing for any WBC title fight. That way, it is clear how much weight they have to lose during camp." The CSAC recently approved a rule to cancel any bout if a fighter weighs in more than 15 percent above the contracted fight weight on the night of the event. The rule should go into effect late next year. Both the WBC and CSAC deserve credit for taking action, but it doesn't go far enough.

All ranked fighters, whether holding a world title or not, should have to

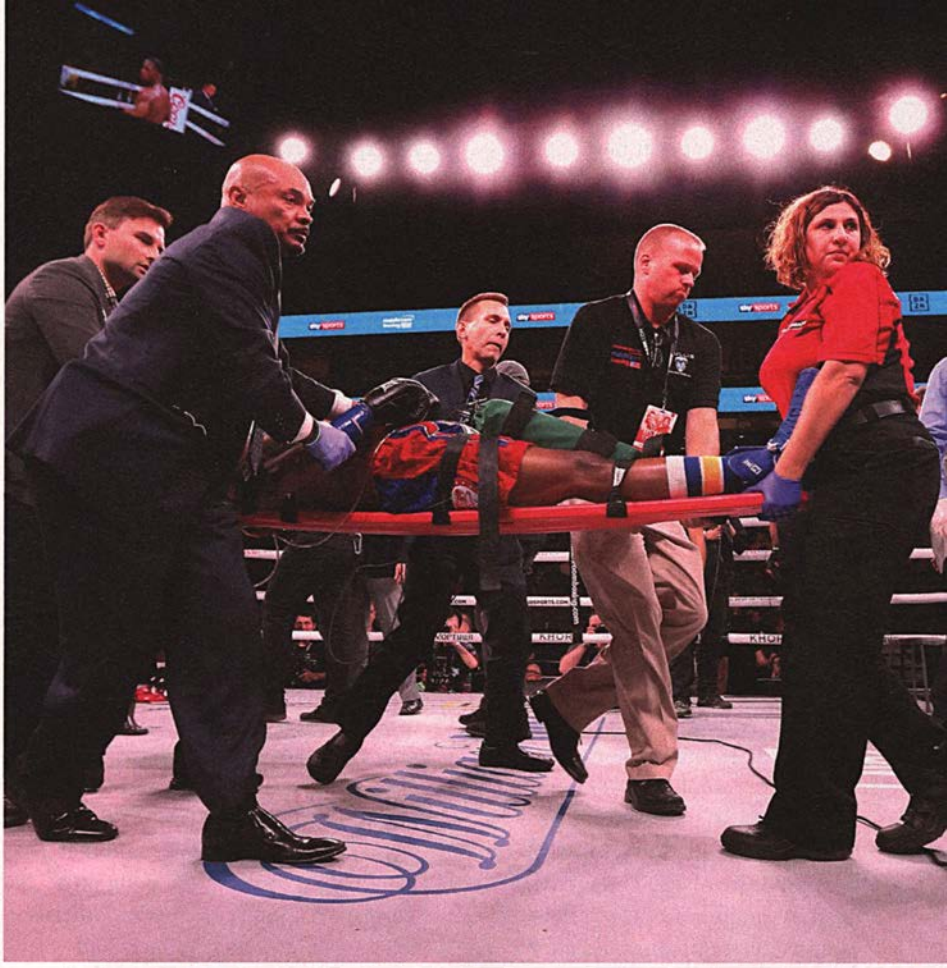
WBC President Mauricio Sulaiman has done a lot to improve fighter safety, but more is needed.

weigh in once a month and come within 12 percent of the division limit for which they compete or lose their rating. For example, a middleweight would have to maintain a weight of 179.2 pounds or less (12 percent over the 160-pound division limit) 365 days a year. This would not only encourage fighters to compete at a more natural division for their body type, but help prevent the weight bully scenario as well. Sulaimán noted that the WBC is currently working on a platform for every fighter to register their weight on a monthly basis with their local commission. No details yet on whether there will be weight thresholds for boxers to meet and/or disciplinary action for those who do not comply.

ANNUAL BRAIN IMAGING:

Obviously head trauma is the number one health concern for boxers. The best way to detect brain abnormalities is through Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI) technology. "All fighters should be required to have a baseline MRI before their first professional fight as a condition of obtaining a federal boxing license," DiBella said. "A baseline MRI allows meaningful comparison in the future. If a fighter is knocked out from a head blow, they should have to do another MRI before their next bout."

While some authorities demand MRIs every year, as the WBC does for their world title holders and challengers, many state commissions will accept an MRI from as much as 5 years ago to license a boxer. "The problem is that most fighters are not competing for a title," Sulaimán said. "And the cost for an MRI is very high for lower-earning fighters." A handful of fighters can afford to have brain scans on a regular basis (MRIs generally start around $500), but the overwhelming majority cannot. However, there are resources available. "The Lou Ruvo Center for Brain Health is currently conducting research so any fighter can go there and receive free annual neurological exams and MRIs," Goodman said. The Lou Ruvo Center is part of the world-renowned Cleveland Clinic, which has locations in Ohio, Florida, Nevada and Canada.



This image of Patrick Day is a grim reminder of the need for improved safety standards.

UNIFORMITY:

This goes back to the flaws within the state regulations system, as well as situations outside the United States, seen in the Hugo Santillán tragedy. There should be global adherence to all medical suspensions and/or disciplinary rulings handed down from any commission. Boxrec.com should serve as an international repository of suspensions. Further, PEDs testing and weight-management programs should be part of the unified rules of the Association of Boxing Commissions (ABC), ensuring that fighters rated by all sanctioning bodies would be subject to them. At present, the WBC is the only group taking any meaningful action toward fighter safety; it's time for the others to pitch in. Sulaimán told The Ring that his organization has presented its fighter safety programs at multiple ABC conventions, but the executive committee has not incorporated them into their unified rules. "I respect all of the commissioners who participate in the ABC," DiBella said, "but the ABC is a joke. It's a toothless, figurehead organization. It has no ability to change or police anything." With the current lack of any unified rules centered on PEDs testing, brain scans and weight management, it's difficult to argue that point.

Which leads to the subject of a national boxing commission in America. Many feel that a national regulatory body, whether federal or private, is necessary. "It is the only way to enforce uniformity," said Goodman. "We have needed it for many years, but unfortunately politics will never let it happen." DiBella agrees. "We need a commission and a commissioner, like the NFL, NBA, et cetera. Even if we can't make that happen, we need standardized health and safety regulations across all of the state

jurisdictions, and that needs to include drug testing."

TRANSPARENCY:

One of the biggest issues right now in regards to PEDs testing is a complete lack of transparency with the fans, the media and other fighters/promotional companies. When a fighter volunteers to undergo strict VADA testing or is enrolled in the CBP, details of the samples collected (what, when, where) and tests performed should be posted for the public to see. For what it's worth, Sulaimán told us that the WBC is working on adding this information to their website in the future.

In the case of an adverse finding, the adjudication process should be handled by one authority with uniform protocol. VADA (and other testing groups) merely conduct testing and report the results to the parties involved. The WBC, for example, adjudicates the results of any adverse findings discovered through the CBP, which many feel is inappropriate. "We cannot rely on ratings organizations, as well intentioned as they may be, to police this stuff," added DiBella. "It needs to be standardized under one authority."

EDUCATION:

This is a no-brainer. Everybody – from commission authorities, trainers and managers to the fighters themselves – needs to be educated on the dangers of repeated head injuries, weight cutting and unknown supplements. "We have to start with educating fighters and trainers at the gym level," Foster told The Ring. "For instance, they have to understand that's it's better for them, for extending their career and their lives, if fighters wait at least 45 days after their last fight before sparring again. You're less likely to get knocked out in the future, and I've got the studies to prove it." Foster said that the CSAC is currently working on a campaign to send commission officials to gyms to meet with trainers and present health and safety information.

The California commission has one of the busiest jurisdictions in the world, putting on more cards than New York, New Jersey, Texas and Nevada combined every year. Hopefully, other commissions will follow their lead. Many of the issues fighters face are simply due to a lack of information.

WHAT WE SHOULD RESEARCH FURTHER

MERCY RULES:

This goes back to the one-sided beatdown scenario discussed above. Should a fight be stopped after a certain number of knockdowns? Should it be stopped once the gap in power-punch connects between two fighters reaches a particular threshold? Should a commission official be updated with scorecards after every round to monitor if a fight should be stopped once a seemingly insurmountable lead has been built? "If a fighter has no chance to win and he's taking a beating, has been dropped multiple times, the fight is no longer competitive," Foster told The Ring. "The fans aren't getting anything out of it by letting it continue, so why not stop it?"

GLOVE SIZE AND HEADGEAR:

Contrary to popular belief, headgear does not improve the concussion situation. In fact, numerous studies in recent years have shown that it actually leads to more concussions, prompting the International Boxing Association (AIBA) to ban headgear before the 2016 Rio Olympics. "Most serious injuries start in the gym,"

Australian middleweight Dwight Ritchie died following an injury suffered during a sparring session. Boxer safety reforms should extend beyond the ring to the gyms.

Goodman noted. "Headgear creates a false sense of security. There is no headgear that I know of that protects against brain injuries, although many companies try to claim that they do. And larger gloves only protect the hands, not the head."

"Think about it this way," DiBella said, "headgear just gives you a bigger target to hit, and larger gloves are just a bigger target to hit with." Some studies have shown that smaller gloves are safer, but the jury is still out. More research is needed in regards to how the different type of padding, as well as glove size, may or may not affect brain injuries. Manufacturers around the world vary in regard to the materials they use and the methods with which they construct boxing gloves. Should materials and manufacturing be standardized? Regulations on glove size and headgear do exist in boxing today, but they vary between jurisdictions and need to be streamlined.

FEWER ROUNDS AND SHORTER ROUND LENGTH:

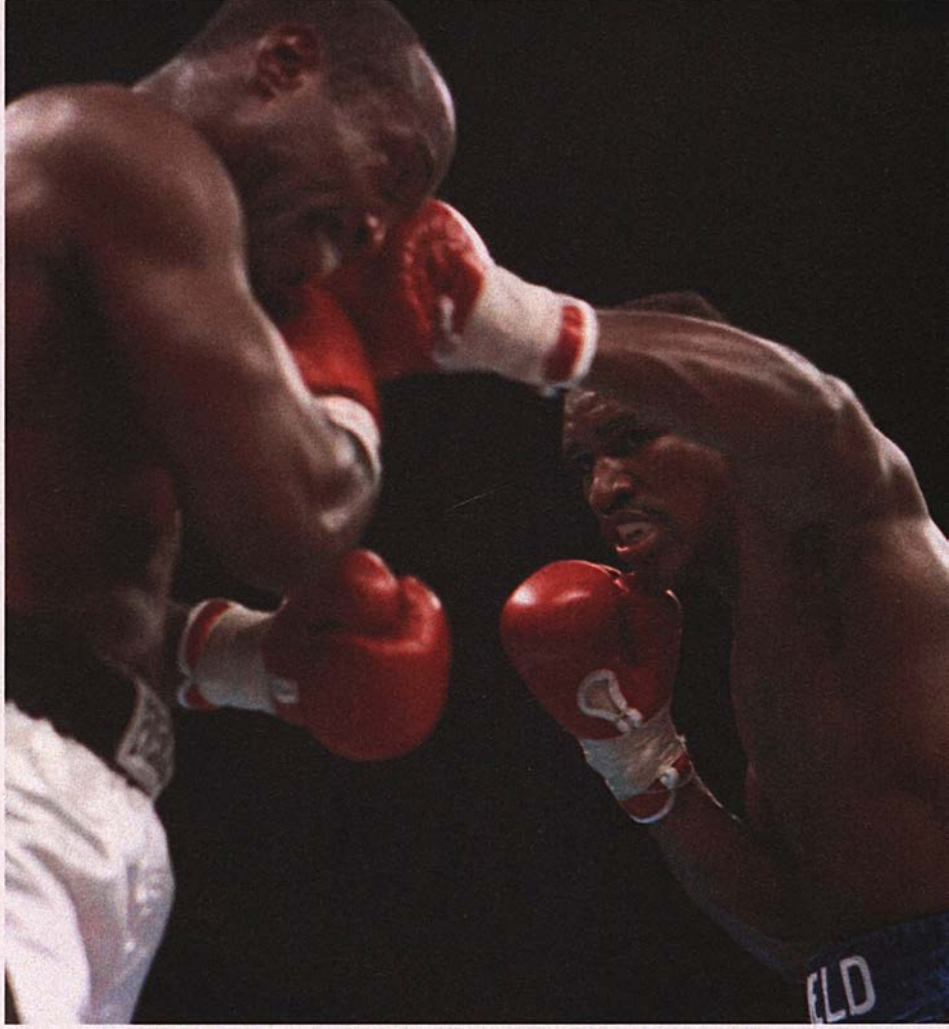
"I like 12-round championship fights and three-minute rounds because I respect the history of boxing," DiBella said, "but if studies were conducted about reducing the number of rounds, or even shortening the length of rounds, that proved a significant advantage health and safety wise, I'd support it. You'd probably get better fights in terms of action, which would make boxing much more attractive to younger fans." Andy Foster agrees. "We all know what a true championship fight is," he said, "but there are so many sanctioning groups now and so many versions of titles, I feel like every club show has 10- and 12-rounders. Maybe we should limit those for unification bouts? Even when champions have "stay busy" fights against lesser opponents, do they need to be 12 rounds? Maybe we could shorten the length of bouts for voluntary defenses." Cutting the number of rounds may make some boxing purists cringe, but it's a concept worth exploring.

Mixed Martial Arts (MMA), which is increasingly popular with the American youth and mainstream sports media, has five-round title fights and generally limits non-title bouts to three rounds. MMA has been sanctioned in the United States for 18 years. Seven deaths have been recorded in sanctioned MMA events over that time, compared to 26 in professional boxing.

REHYDRATION LIMITS:

Both the WBC and the IBF currently have rehydration limits for their title bouts. The WBC weighs fighters upon arrival at the fight venue on the evening of the event, whereas the IBF weighs fighters on the morning of. The jury is still out on whether rehydration limits are a good thing or a bad thing. "I don't like the IBF rule in particular," Foster said. "The fighter is essentially cutting weight twice. I've got plenty of data that shows it isn't helping anything."

If you're still reading at this point of the article, well, then you're more dedicated to fighter safety than most.



Grueling 15-round title bouts, such as Evander Holyfield-Dwight Muhammad Qawi I, are a thing of the past. Perhaps 12-round bouts should be, too.

This subject doesn't seem to garner the same amount of clicks, likes and shares as other more juicy topics. Yet with all the issues boxing faces today, and there are plenty, this is undoubtedly one of the most salient. There are those who argue that nothing can be done, but they're wrong. There are things we can do right now to improve fighter safety. The process of getting there will be messy and hotly debated but more than worth it in the end. Since when has anything in boxing not been?

Michael Montero can be found on YouTube, Twitter, Facebook and Instagram via @MonteroOnBoxing. His weekly podcast 'The Neutral Corner' can be heard on iTunes, Spotify, iHeartRadio and elsewhere.

THE GREAT ESCAPE

BLAIR COBBS LITERALLY LOST HIS IDENTITY IN THE CHAOS SURROUNDING HIS FUGITIVE FATHER, BUT HE REBUILT HIMSELF IN THE BOXING RING

By **Joseph Santoliquito**

Blair Cobbs has an energy that leads to explosive action inside the ring and a flamboyant persona outside of it. The real drama is in his life story, though.

STEVE MARCUS

Blair "The Flair" Cobbs wasn't about to do that. He wasn't about to judge the man seated across from him, because hell knows the man had been judged enough. This time, they weren't talking on a phone separated by sepia-toned, inch-thick prison Plexiglas. This was more intimate, more visceral, just Blair and his father, Eugene, in the living room of Blair's three-bedroom Las Vegas apartment, having a deep, cathartic conversation – finally – about a cloud that hovered over both of their lives.

Their eyes didn't miss each other. There was no tension in the air like before a fight.

They agreed, father and son, that nothing will change the past – and damn, what a past. They agreed, father and son, that they have the present and could have an even better future.

Eugene Nicholas Cobbs, who was also known as Eric Wiggins and Marquis T. Munroe, was sentenced in June 2010 to 151 months in prison, followed by five years of supervised release for his role in a nationwide cocaine conspiracy, ending in an airplane crash in December 2004.

Yes, that Eugene Nicholas Cobbs, the man who was released from a Phoenix-area halfway house on August 28, 2019, after an escape from a minimum-security federal prison in 2013 tacked on additional time to his original sentence.

A hardened man who was seeking forgiveness from his son. Eugene was remorseful for the times he abandoned Blair and his sister, Ashley, and forced them into a life on the run, which led them to Guadalajara, Mexico, where Blair found his lifesaver, boxing.

"Yeah, how twisted it sounds. Who knows where I would be without boxing, and if my father didn't lead the life he led? Who knows if I would have even found boxing?" admitted Blair, 29, a rangy 5-foot-10½ welterweight southpaw. In his most recent fight, Blair (13-0, 9 knockouts) stopped Carlos Ortiz Cervantes in six on the Canelo Alvarez-Sergey Kovalev undercard on November 2 in Las Vegas, stealing the show with his crazy post-fight celebration.

For once, it was good to know who he was – and is. For once, it was good to know he was on stable ground.

"I was about four or five different aliases when we were living in Guadalajara, but you live and you lie so much, you forget who you were and who you are as a person," Blair said. "That was a hard lifestyle, to the point where I had to remember all of the lies. Identity early on for me was a crisis. But I was a kid. I didn't know or care. I just wanted to die. I knew my father had something to do with drugs.

"I mean it. I wanted to find a way

out of that life. There were thoughts of it. It wasn't the worst idea to die, in that particular time of my life, in that particular environment. There was no stability. You think about suicide, just thoughts. It wasn't the worst idea, because we were dealing with a series of things that could have happened that really weren't good."

Blair, who was signed to Golden Boy Promotions in 2019, a year that saw him win four bouts against solid opposition, was born in Philadelphia on December 30, 1989. He lived with his mother until she shipped him and his sister out to Los Angeles when he was 14 to live with their father. By then, his parents had been separated for seven years. Blair couldn't believe it. He moved into a luxurious mansion in the Hollywood Hills. He attended Beverly Hills High School. Eugene possessed Bentleys, airplanes, you name it.

Authorities questioned it.

The Cobbs family was living "the life," yet no questions were asked as to how they were doing it. Eugene never had what could be defined as discernable income. He told local law enforcement that he was a plumber and that the money he accrued was his life savings.

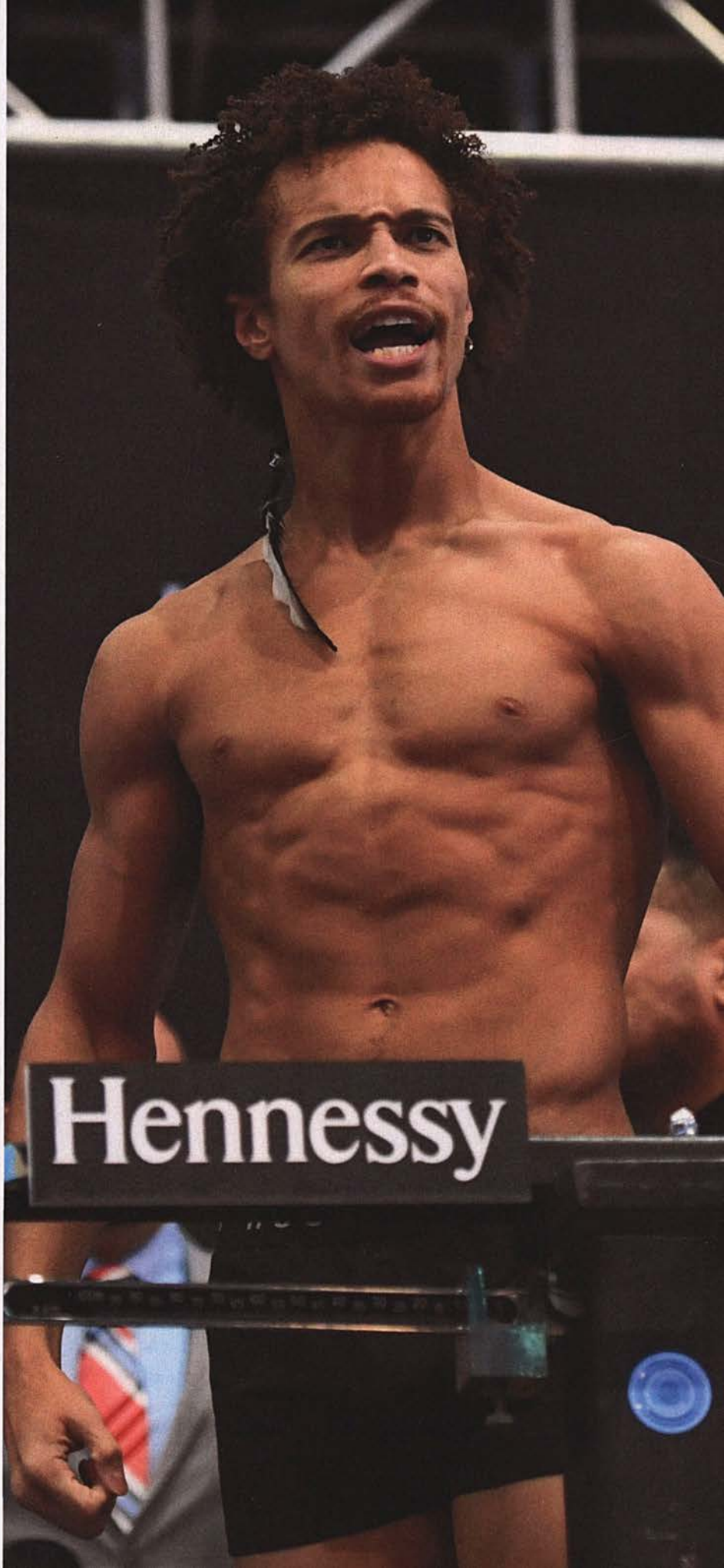
It seemed suspicious.

And gradually, authorities began slowly tightening their circle around Eugene Nicholas Cobbs.

Over the next few years, Blair lost his mother to a crazy circumstance, when she and numerous others died of carbon monoxide poisoning during a party on a yacht. Around that same time, his maternal grandmother died of cancer.

One day arriving home from school in 2004, Blair's reality became quite different. The mansion was turned over. Law enforcement had ripped through the house, leaving everything disheveled. Eugene Cobbs was gone.

Blair and Ashley didn't know what had happened.



Boxing was Cobbs' anchor during a dysfunctional on-the-run upbringing, and he took to it like a natural.

On December 18, 2004, Eugene took off from Compton Airport in a 1977 twin-engine Piper Aerostar with 525 pounds of cocaine, worth $24 million on the street, on a cross-country run to Philadelphia. He refueled in Blanding, Utah, and then Cameron, Missouri. Attempting to land again in snowy weather, he overshot the runway at Wheeling-Ohio County Airport in West Virginia and ditched the plane in a nearby wooded ravine.

Eugene, who already had a criminal record, walked away unscathed. He threw a wad of cash at a passing Good Samaritan and was dropped off at a motel. Eugene used one of his aliases to check in, made arrangements with one of his minions and got to Philadelphia. From there, now knowing he was back on law enforcement's radar, he fled to Guadalajara, got in touch with his wife in Los Angeles to get the kids packed and ready, and off they went.

"We just knew it was something bad, and we moved into this small, two-bedroom house in Beverly Hills to finish out the school year," recalled Blair, who's known for his over-the-top wrestling persona – complete with Ric Flair's signature "Woo!" – and untamed hairstyle. "We didn't even ask questions. My father was gone. My mother was gone, my grandmother was gone and my stepmother couldn't stand me or my sister.

"A month later, we just left, packing one duffel bag each, and left the country. We got fake IDs and kept going south. I have no clue how it all worked out. But we got to Guadalajara, where we met my dad."

There, Blair was introduced to boxing through close friend Rodney Pineda.

Pineda, now 29, first noticed Blair playing basketball; he was a rarity – an African-American teenager in Mexico. Something else, Pineda felt, was an oddity: He never went to Blair's house; they always went to his.

"We busted it up, playing one-on-one, and one day another friend told us about this boxing gym called El Lobo, which was really far," Pineda remembered. "We went in there the first day and we both found out that boxing is a hard fucking sport. They put us in the gym right away. We found a local gym, and within the first month we were going to both places and sparring pros.

"We grabbed some money from our parents and drove out there at a young age. The cops stopped us and I would ask them how much the ticket was. They would say 200 pesos, which is like 20 dollars. I would pay them right there and tell them I had to hurry because I was late for work. Blair loved it. I remember him hitting the bag and how angry he seemed to be. Blair really found discipline in the ring."

There's plenty of room to grow, however. Cobbs is an aggressive, wild swinger, and that can lead to trouble, creating holes in the southpaw's defense.

"Blair is good right now, but he could be great because of his athleticism and his ability," said Clarence "Bones" Adams, a former 122-pound titleholder who met Cobbs when the fledgling fighter was living out of his car in Las Vegas and now partners with Brandon Woods as his co-trainer. "But Blair is going to be Blair. He holds himself back. He needs to step back and learn and take our advice. Like the last fight (when he beat Cervantes), he wouldn't box the way we wanted him to. He boxed the way he wanted to.

"It made us look bad as trainers, like we're not doing our job. Blair is a phenomenal, fantastic young man, and he's so athletic. But what happens when the athleticism runs out? We're trying to prevent that and trying to make sure he does everything properly. Blair has the potential to be great, he really does. I believe in him. He's very strong and athletic. I just wish he would listen some more."

One thing Cobbs doesn't lack is personality. And he's certainly entertaining. His major disadvantage is that he's a 29-year-old "prospect." Time is vital.

Mexico was bad, but when Blair moved back to Philadelphia, it got worse. He found out his father had been arrested by Mexican immigration authorities on December 5, 2008, and extradited to Houston, then brought to West Virginia. A news report let Blair know his father was in custody, which actually turned out to be a relief. "I thought my dad was dead," Blair said.

Eugene wasn't through dodging manhunts, though. On April 10, 2013, he escaped the Federal Correctional Institution in Morgantown, West Virginia, and was caught once again trying to enter Mexico a year later. By then, Blair was 3-0 as a pro.

"I don't know what allowed me to open up to my father again," Blair said. "It was important to see him there in the crowd (for the Cervantes fight in November). I have no time to hold on to old wounds. Someone like me, I still think something will happen to me, so I got over it with my dad. We had a heart-to-heart and he said he was sorry for all of the things that he's done. I was able to visit him in jail. It was awesome seeing me work and seeing him there in the crowd. I felt like I was the show, even when Canelo and Ryan Garcia were fighting. I started with my 'Wooo' and the rest of the crowd 'Woooed' me back."

Eugene Cobbs didn't see his son after the fight. Blair was told his father was too emotional to see him.

"There were dark times when I thought there was no reason to go on, and now with boxing in my life, it has saved me," Blair said. "I don't know where I would be and if I would be alive if not for boxing. I want to inspire people. And I have to forgive my father. We're talking; we're hopefully going to move forward together.

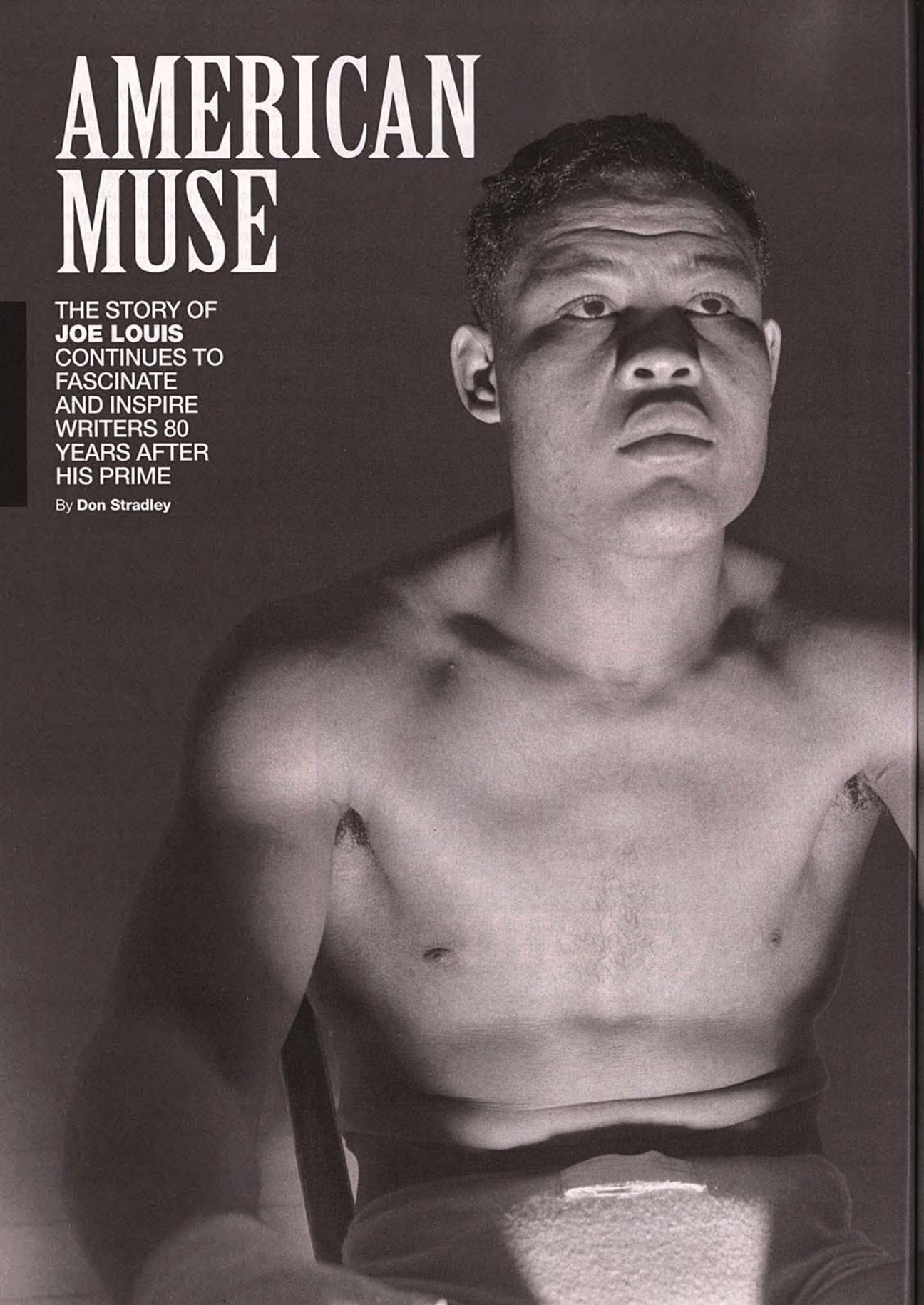
"I always thought my father cared, but we didn't always have a great relationship. For a long while, I used to think he didn't really love me. But he prepared me to fight in this ugly world. I have to give him credit for that. With everything I've been through, sometimes I feel like I can't die."

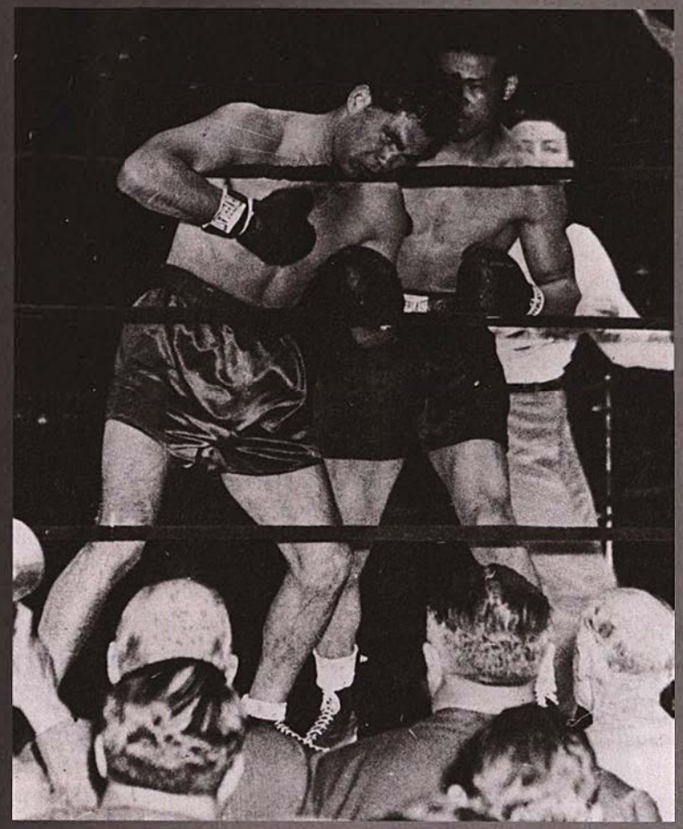
ETHAN MILLER

AMERICAN MUSE

THE STORY OF **JOE LOUIS** CONTINUES TO FASCINATE AND INSPIRE WRITERS 80 YEARS AFTER HIS PRIME

By **Don Stradley**





Has any prizefight held more social and historic significance than Joe Louis' one-round destruction of Max Schmeling? No wonder writers are still fascinated by Louis.

In the years since his death in 1981, Joe Louis has provided authors with a nearly bottomless well of inspiration. They love how he embodied America's fighting spirit at a perilous time in history and the way he battered Germany's Max Schmeling, allegedly hitting him so hard at one point that Schmeling turned to ringsiders and screamed as if being murdered in an alley.

In 2019 alone, Louis was the subject of two new books, including an illustrated novel aimed at young adults called *A Fist for Joe Louis and Me* by Trinka Hakes Noble and Nicole Tadgell. Scheduled for release in March 2020 is Thomas Myler's *Joe Louis: The Rise and Fall of the Brown Bomber*, a 352-page mastodon from Pitch Publishing priced at $32.95. Such a whopping sum proves that publishers still have faith in Louis.

Of the more than 1,000 products on Amazon that have Louis' name on them, over 300 are in the books category, which also include a few books about Louis' opponents and old magazines where Louis was featured. Still, what catches the eye is the more recent deluge of hardcovers and paperbacks devoted to Louis, with more than a half dozen hefty biographies, plus in-depth examinations of the Louis-Schmeling bouts, academic studies, handsomely packaged photo collections and even a 2017 novel called *Joe Louis is Coming to Town!* by Leonard Varasano. There's a recent book about Detroit sports history with Louis on the cover, and the past decade saw two small press reissues of Louis' *How To Box*, a ghostwritten title that first appeared in 1948, which shows contemporary publishers are keen for almost anything to do with Louis. The great Willie Pep, who won 229 fights and has been gone only 13 years, doesn't get one-tenth of the attention.

It begs the question why. Louis had some great fights, of course, a magnificent championship reign and a long, tragic downfall that is like catnip for a certain type of author. But isn't it rather astonishing that a man who fought long before most homes had a television is still on the minds of writers and publishers? We might expect this of a baseball player, but a boxer?

We'd have to look to two fighters of more recent vintage – Muhammad Ali and Mike Tyson – to find names that appear with more frequency on Amazon's boxing category. They have each surpassed Louis with distance to spare. But here's the rub: Louis' fighting prime was 80 years ago. Using the same standard, will books be written about Ali in the 2040s? Or Tyson in the 2060s? As an American icon, Louis has impressive staying power.

"You have to look at the times he lived in," said Randy Roberts, a professor of history at Purdue University and author of *Joe Louis: Hard Times Man* (2010). "Boxing was really big. It was an important part of American life. That's part of it. What he meant to African Americans is part of it.

"But for me, perhaps the biggest thing is that Joe Louis is so interesting and so complex, yet he said so little and never gave away much about himself. I don't know if 'mysterious' is the right word, but maybe it is. You wonder what he really thought about things. His deepest emotions were never known. In the photograph used for the cover of my book, they used this old shot of him that is fascinating. There's so much in his face. There's almost a look of sadness, plus he's kind of threatening, and it's almost lit like a horror movie. You can stare at it, but he's inscrutable."

Along with his enigmatic nature, Louis was also dynamite in the ring. Jerry Izenberg, longtime columnist for the New Jersey Star Ledger

BETTMANN

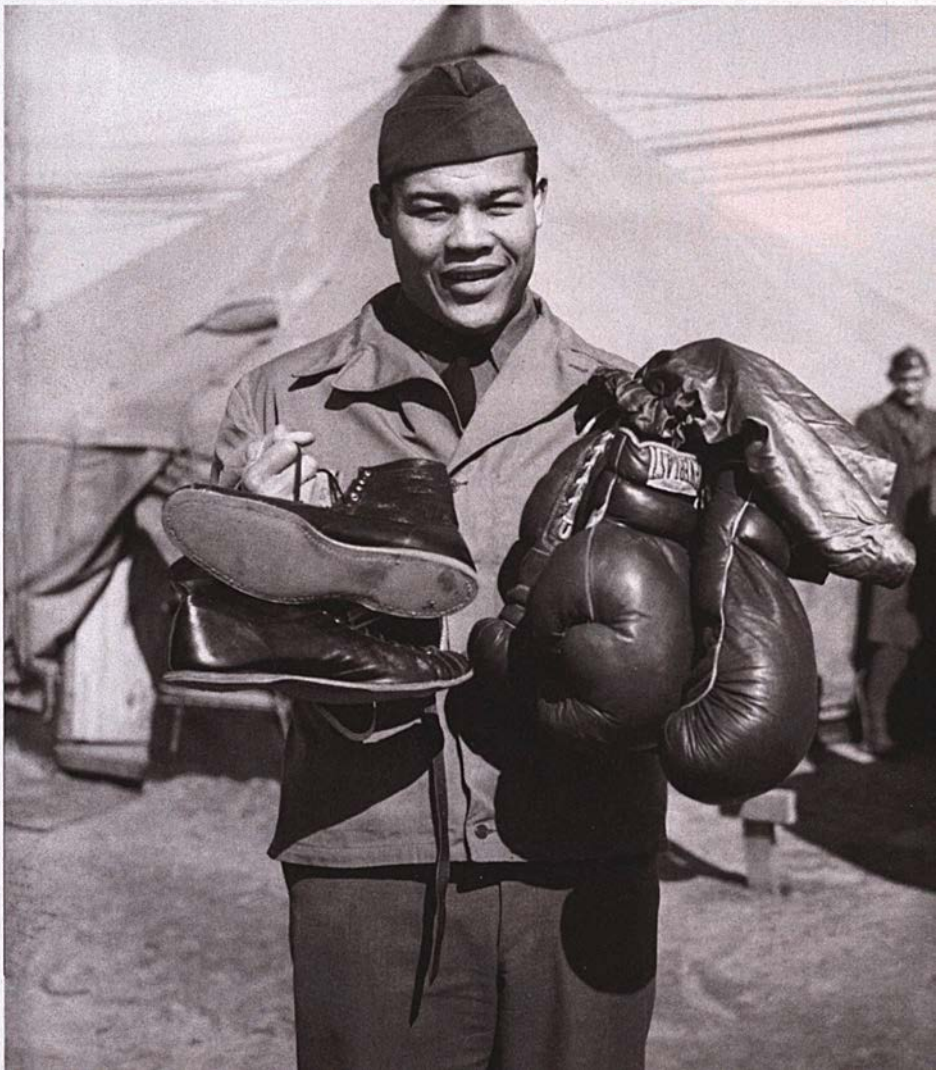
and a member of the International Boxing Hall of Fame, is still awed by Louis' ability to knock men flat. "He was the best heavyweight I ever saw and knew," Izenberg told The Ring. "Technically, he was far superior to Ali and to others who were outstanding. His left hook to the solar plexus traveled maybe eight inches and was so quick most people thought the right hand that followed it was the knockout punch. Ringside reporters often failed to see the left – it was that fast."

If Louis' knockout punch and sphinxlike persona aren't enough, add his explosive two-bout series with Schmeling. Knocked out in the 12th round of their 1936 bout, his aura of invincibility tarnished, his millions of black fans heartbroken, Louis roared back for the 1938 rematch and bombed Schmeling out at 2:04 of the first round. With Schmeling said to be linked to Hitler, the bout's political symbolism was unprecedented, though in retrospect, some of the mythology has been bent slightly to make it even more significant. Schmeling was German, true, and there were Nazi propagandists who wanted to benefit from his successes, but he most certainly did not share any Nazi beliefs. Also, Louis' rematch with Schmeling was a moneymaker in its day, but a fact that has been scrubbed away by time is that the gate for Louis-Schmeling II was only slightly greater than Louis' 1935 bout with Max Baer, and significantly less than Louis' 1946 bout with Billy Conn. But with Louis, ticket sales are only a minor part of the legend.

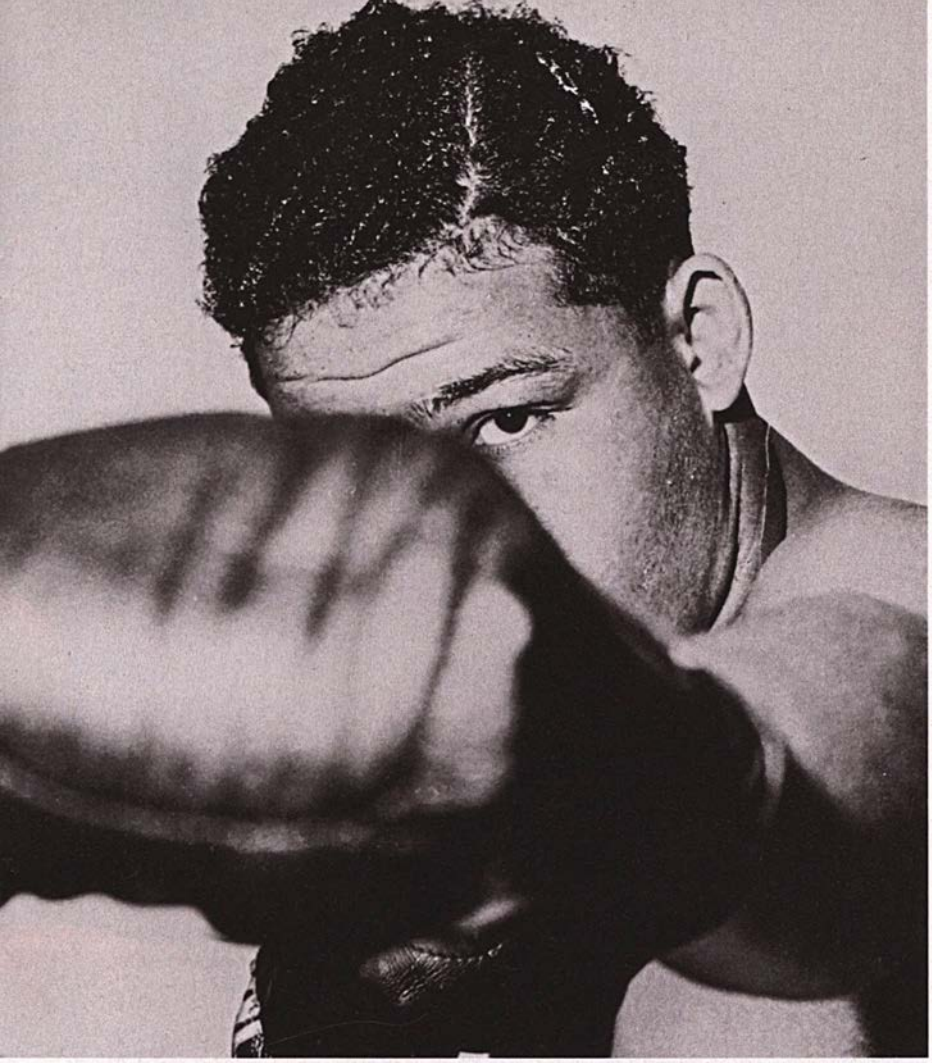
"It was the fight that made white America cheer for him," Roberts said of Louis-Schmeling II. "It was dramatic and touched America emotionally. Without Schmeling, Louis would not be as big in a historical sense. The fights with Schmeling are what made him transcend boxing. Without Schmeling, he might not transcend boxing. It would be like Muhammad Ali's career if you subtracted Joe Frazier. To be a great fighter, you need great competition. You need a rivalry. You need that defining moment that people can look back on. Schmeling was his *bête noir*."

But Louis may have had an amazing impact, anyway. Unlike most African American fighters of his time, he wasn't forced to spend years fighting in obscure locations for short money, or take dives against the promoter's latest darling. Louis was treated like a star right out of the gate. "He had good management," said Roberts, "and when he signed with Mike Jacobs, who wanted to control boxing in New York, it was if Jacobs had the keys to the kingdom. Black fighters didn't get great contracts in those days, but the heavyweight champions immediately preceding him hadn't meant much to the public. Jacobs knew what he had with Louis. The sport needed Louis."

Those early years are also part of what fascinates authors about the Louis story. It's as if his life can be neatly divided into three compelling sections, as if a playwright set out to create the life of an unforgettable character. There is the 1934-1941 period, where young Louis emerged from obscurity to take Chicago and then New York by storm; the middle period, where he returned from military duty in World War II as a kind of national symbol, only to suffer some painful defeats in the ring and endless harassment over unpaid taxes; and finally, the bizarre Las Vegas period, where he soothed his craving for action, where his panic attacks and paranoia could be covered up by his casino associates, and where he could be the Joe Louis that no one really knew, the one that liked drugs, gambling, and prostitutes. Part of Louis' charm was that he had always seemed like such a soft-spoken



Louis, in part because of his morale efforts during World War II, is the first African-American sports figure idolized by white America.



As popular as Mike Tyson has been, both as a fighter and a celebrity, it's doubtful he'll have the literary longevity of Joe Louis.

gentleman, but he was as rough and raw as anyone. He developed a taste for narcotics during the 1930s while running with his show business pals; he was experimenting with heroin by the time he turned 50. Though these later years provide his biographies with some gravitas, many of Louis' chroniclers are content to cover the pre-war period. It's probably more fun to discuss Louis battling Primo Carnera than his cocaine addiction.

Strangely, though Louis was given tons of newspaper coverage in his day, he wasn't a particularly compelling subject for book authors until years after he died. There'd been a couple of ghostwritten memoirs during his lifetime and one or two slim biographies, but even in the immediate aftermath of his passing there wasn't great interest in Louis from publishers. "Louis' death wasn't that big a deal," said Roberts. "It was felt in the boxing community, but it didn't have the sort of worldwide impact of Ali's death. You can argue about how in tune Ali really was, but he was a world figure with a lot of media attention."

The arrival of Chris Mead's 1985 book, *Champion: Joe Louis, Black Hero in White America*, seemed to wake people up. Thoughtful, melodramatic, dripping with Louis lore, Mead's book was given a major publicity push and even excerpted in Sports Illustrated. It was a bit of a publishing event, and it appeared to encourage other authors to plunder the Louis saga. This renewed interest in Louis went on throughout the 1990s and hasn't abated. Until the flurry of new Ali books since his death in 2016, Louis rivaled Ali as far as library shelf space. Or, if you like, the Kindle.

"Louis and Ali share a strange common link," said Izenberg. "Hitler and Vietnam. Louis' second fight with Schmeling was at a time when we were on the brink of what geographically became our largest war ever. His storybook ending to that fight at a time when this country knew what that title would have meant to Hitler was the most popular victory ever by any American boxer. Conversely, Vietnam divided this country as never before. Ali was an early and powerful voice against it and he was elevated to becoming part of the public conscious when America dramatically changed its view and made him a hero."

Could a Mike Tyson still be written about decades from now, or will he be too closely identified with the cheap celebrity of his era?

"I don't think Tyson will have the longevity of Louis or Ali," said Roberts. "He was an interesting figure, but I'm not sure that he transcended boxing. His career, it was one of those things where you just had to be there."

"Louis is the bookmark," said Izenberg. "Forget Tyson. But I believe Ali will be spoken of, not just 80 years from his prime, but 80 years from now. He and Louis both have a rare kind of enduring history."

The obvious question, then, is how long will interest in Louis last? As more time passes, could there be continued curiosity about a man who had his first professional fight in 1934? Perhaps this lasting appeal, even more so than his nearly 12-year title reign, has been Louis' grandest achievement.

"There's so much more to write about him," said Roberts. "I liked him before, but after writing my book, I'm even more fascinated by him."

For now and at least the immediate future, a fighter who began his career during the years of the Dust Bowl and John Dillinger remains a hot topic for publishers. Why not? If anyone deserves a book about him now and then, it would be the guy who smashed the Nazi menace in the middle of Yankee Stadium at 2:04 of Round 1.

BATTLE-TESTED

KATIE TAYLOR WAS PUSHED TO THE LIMIT IN A GRUELING BATTLE WITH **DELFINE PERSOON**, BUT THE LIGHTWEIGHT CHAMPION SAYS THE EXPERIENCE ONLY MADE HER STRONGER

By **Thomas Gerbasi**

Katie Taylor knew exactly what she was in for when she faced off with Delfine Persoon at Madison Square Garden on June 1 with the inaugural Ring lightweight championship and all four sanctioning body titles on the line. So the fighting pride of Bray, County Wicklow, Ireland, wasn't surprised when the Belgian brawler took her to those dark places all boxers see at one time or another.

What *did* shock Taylor was the reaction to her 10-round majority decision victory from many corners.

"I think we were just a bit surprised and baffled at all the controversy afterwards, really," she said. "We couldn't believe it, to be quite honest. You can't call a close fight like that a robbery or a disgrace. That in itself is a disgrace. We were a bit disappointed by all that. All in all, we knew it wasn't my best performance, but I dug deep and I came out with a victory and I came out as the undisputed champion, so it was mission accomplished for us."

Taylor, a perfectionist at her core, may say it wasn't her best performance, but when she deviated from her stick-and-move game plan to brawl with Persoon, it was a glorious reminder that no one loves perfection in the ring, at least not for very long. What fans love is heart, grit and a willingness to go into the trenches in order to fight for every inch of real estate in that ring. And that's what Taylor and Persoon both delivered, making it a clear Fight of the Year choice for 2019.

"That's what makes a great fighter, isn't it?" asks Taylor. "That's what separates a good fighter from a great fighter, I think, being able to show the heart and courage to fight through adversity. I've been in plenty of spars where I've had to dig deep through that as well, and I know that what you're doing in training constantly, you have to do it on fight night, and I've been doing that for years. You actually get nervous before a hard spar when you have to dig deep and show a lot of heart, and that's what it's all about. But it gives me great confidence knowing that if it does go that way, I can dig deep and pull it out."

The back-and-forth action in New York City on the Anthony Joshua-Andy Ruiz Jr. undercard was undeniable, as were the high stakes that had so many belts on the line. But what about this controversy when it came to the scoring? Was it warranted? Anyone who watched the fight knows it was close, and Taylor admits as much. But, at the same time, she has no doubt that she deserved the two 96-94 scores delivered by judges John Poturaj and Allen Nace that overruled the 95-95 tally turned in by Don Trella.

"We knew I was going to be in the trenches at some stages in that fight, and we knew that I was gonna have to show a lot of heart during the fight as well," she said. "But we did feel

The 10-round slugfest between Katie Taylor and Delfine Persoon for the undisputed women's lightweight championship is a 2019 Fight of the Year candidate.

that we got some of the early rounds and clinched the victory. I would have liked to have beat her a lot more convincingly, but I did come out as the deserved winner at the end, I felt."

Taylor was expected to win convincingly by casual fans who had little to no knowledge of Persoon's credentials before the fight. Readers of The Ring don't fall into that category, as they would have known that before the 34-year-old Belgian's first fight in the United States, she had won 34 straight bouts, successfully defending her WBC title nine times while earning two Female Fighter of the Year awards in 2014 and 2015. In other words, this wasn't going to be a Taylor showcase; it was going to be a superfight for the sport.

Yet even as the bout opened, DAZN commentator Brian Kenny had the following to say:

"What we're wondering is: Will there be a gap in class, or is Persoon actually at that same level as Katie Taylor?"

Even DAZN's boxing handicapper, Danny Sheridan, had Taylor as a 10-1 favorite, so with each rush by Persoon, it was as if she was pulling off a shocking upset instead of fighting at the level that should have been expected of her. In situations like that, any positive moments from the underdog often overrule consistent work by the favorite. So after Taylor started strong in the first round, a late surge by Persoon in Round 2 changed the perception of the fight in the eyes of many.

"I think that's the case with all my opponents, really," said Taylor. "I don't think anyone really gives any of my opponents any credit, and they just think I'm gonna walk on over everyone. But there are no easy fights at this stage of my career. And especially for the Persoon fight, we knew this was gonna be the hardest of my career so far. She's obviously a very, very experienced fighter. She's a very physical fighter as well, very big, she punches a lot and it was going to be tough from the first round to the 10th."

It was. And by Round 3, a boxing match turned into a brawl, with Taylor scoring with flush shots while Persoon was a dervish willing to miss three to land one. And as a credit to Persoon's experience and Taylor's innate desire to scrap, the Belgian soon had Taylor in a trench war that the Ireland native welcomed as she told Persoon to bring it on in Round 5.

"I definitely love to fight a bit too much, and I got caught into a bit of a fight in that one," Taylor said in the understatement of the year. "I do love a good scrap, I have to say, and it definitely made for a very exciting fight, but it was probably a bit too exciting for my liking."

It was a bit too exciting for Team Taylor as well – mainly trainer Ross Enamait, who implored his fighter to make Persoon pay for her wild rushes by playing matador to the bull. And in Round 6, Taylor listened, using slick movement to leave Persoon swinging wildly and stumbling toward the ropes.

But then Persoon roared back in Rounds 7 and 8, and Taylor was showing the wear of the fight on her face. Again, Enamait got his charge back on track and Taylor impressed in the ninth round, a pivotal one for sure.

"The ninth round was vital, and there was no doubt that Katie won that," said her manager, Brian Peters. And while the cleaner shots were landed by Persoon in the 10th, the exhausted Taylor never stopped throwing until the final bell sounded.

"I knew that every round was a close round, and I did end up in the trenches there as well, so that always makes for an exciting fight – kind of like the Ward-Gatti days," said Taylor. "I don't want to be involved in too many of those fights (laughs), but it's great to come out of those fights as the winner."

STEPHEN MCCARTHY

Taylor, The Ring's inaugural women's lightweight champ, has the utmost respect for Persoon as a competitor but dismisses the cries of "robbery" from the Belgian veteran (and many fans) following their fight.

When it was over, many thought the decision would go Persoon's way, but in a close fight like this one, any verdict would have been a just one. CompuBox punch stats saw Persoon go 116 of 586 (19.8 percent) as opposed to 103 of 410 (25.1 percent) for Taylor, showing the story of the fight, with Persoon more aggressive and Taylor more accurate. For the record, this scribe scored it 96-94 for Taylor both on site and watching it later on the DAZN app, with four rounds too close to call.

That's the definition of a great fight, and one that deserves a rematch. Team Taylor agrees.

"We knew straight away that a rematch was gonna be inevitable, because it was such a close fight, and we very much look forward to that rematch as well," said Taylor. It's a sentiment echoed by Peters, who said, "Persoon is a great, great fighter, and nobody gave her any credit, which was very wrong. She's tough, she's strong, she's improved a good bit and she's a hell of a fighter. She was talking a bit of rubbish after (laughs), but she's a really good fighter."

That "rubbish" was Persoon's assertion that she was robbed, an understandable reaction after such a grueling, nip-and-tuck fight. Yet with Taylor willing to run it back and Persoon wanting a second shot as well, 2020 may already have its Fight of the Year candidate. But for now, Taylor will savor this one.

"Me and Ross and the team are delighted with the victory, and to come out as the undisputed champion is what every fighter dreams of at the end of the day," she said. "And regardless of what anyone says, we did come out the victor, and it was well-deserved."

WORLD BEAT

Those who thought that Nonito Donaire would be an easy night for Inoue were sorely mistaken.

PHILIPPINES

BY RYAN SONGALIA

Regardless of what happened in Tokyo, Nonito Donaire had long since punched his ticket to the International Boxing Hall of Fame. Many expected the aging champion to come in for one last hurrah against a rising star in Naoya Inoue, who was 10 years his junior at 26. Some even expected Donaire to be finished inside of the first half of the fight.

Instead, Donaire showed that, yes, it's possible to add to one's legacy even in defeat, pushing Inoue to his physical limits in the finale of the World Boxing Super Series tournament. Donaire showed he still had speed, power and resilience in rising off the canvas late in the fight and, most importantly, a champion's desire to be great. The fight, his only loss as a bantamweight, is likely Donaire's most exciting to date, and it reaffirmed the warrior's heart that lies beneath his natural ability.

Donaire drew blood from above Inoue's right eye in Round 2, the product of a left hook, and nearly dropped the then-No. 4 pound-for-pounder in the ninth with a right, putting the previously invincible fighter in real peril for the first time in his pro career.

Nonito Donaire Sr., the father/trainer of "The Filipino Flash," says he has known for a long time that his son had world-class courage: "Nonito fought always with the heart. When he fought (Vic) Darchinyan (in 2007), nobody expected that he would knock Darchinyan out."

The elder Donaire shared a story about driving with his son from the Bay Area to Los Angeles to try out for the second season of *The Contender*, which aired in 2006, thinking it was a bantamweight tournament. Instead, it was a welterweight tournament. Donaire Sr. says Nonito was only 124 pounds and tried out against someone who was 146 pounds and stopped him in the second round.

"Since he started fighting, he's been tough. He never backed down to anybody. He wants to beat up anybody in his way," said Donaire Sr.

While he says his son has nothing left to prove, Donaire Sr. thinks the four-division titleholder has "a lot left in the tank" and "can still beat anybody at 118, including Inoue."

As for Inoue, Donaire Sr. isn't particularly impressed.

"He's a regular fighter for me. Nonito exposed him," he said.

"He was lucky that Nonito didn't land a single punch to his jaw. Or else it could be 'good night' for him."

★★★

Romero Duno didn't get the result he had hoped for, losing to Ryan Garcia in the first round on the November 2 Canelo Alvarez-Sergey Kovalev undercard. Duno, who had been hit-or-miss since his breakout KO victory against Christian Gonzalez in 2017, figured

to be a serious test for the popular lightweight. Instead, he was felled by a right hand-left hook combo that caught him as he came in aggressively, leading to a stoppage without a count.

"We have to let the wound heal. Obviously, we are still shocked at what happened," said Jim Claude Manangquil, who co-promotes the lightweight fringe contender from Tagum City. Manangquil expects Duno will have a return fight in the Philippines once he's ready to get back in the ring. "We didn't expect that kind of ending with that fight, but this is boxing. We just have to accept it and move on."

One of his fighters who is ready to return is Jade Bornea (14-0, 10 KOs), the 24-year-old junior bantamweight from General Santos City. He'll make his U.S. debut on January 30 against Ernesto Delgadillo (11-0-2, 2 KOs) at Legends Casino in Washington. Bornea once beat Kosei Tanaka and stopped Murodjon Akhmadaliev in the same amateur tournament in 2013, but Manangquil thinks Bornea might be even better as a pro.

"I feel that Jade is one of my best talents. I've wanted to showcase him overseas, but I was being patient and I think this is the right time," said Manangquil.

"It is rare to be given a break in America," said Bornea. "As a boxer, it is one of my dreams to fight there."

What are the tourist sites he hopes to see in the U.S.? "I want to go to Disneyland and the Statue of Liberty."

★★★

By the time you're reading this, Aston Palicte will have returned to the ring on December 21 to face fellow Filipino Crison Omayao. Palicte, of Bago City, was last in the ring in June, when he was stopped in 10 rounds by Kazuto Ioka for the vacant WBO junior bantamweight title. Palicte, 28, had been unbeaten in his previous six bouts, including a draw against Donnie Nietes for that same belt.

★★★

In case you were wondering, Manny Pacquiao averaged 630 punches thrown and 194 punches landed (30.8 percent) per fight in the 2010s, for an average of 17 landed and 56 attempted per round over 181 rounds in 16 fights, according to CompuBox records. You can thank my interactive class project at Craig Newmark Graduate School of Journalism for getting me to crunch those numbers.

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SOUTH AFRICA

BY DROEKS MALAN

Simpiwe Konkco tried his best to unseat long-reigning WBC strawweight kingpin Wanheng Menayothin, but it was not to be; he lost a unanimous decision by scores of 118-109, 116-110 and 117-109 in Chonburi, Thailand, on October 25.

Konkco was competitive in spots, but there is a reason why Menayothin has the longest unbeaten streak of any active fighter. The former Muay Thai champion is tough as teak and he can fight.

The contest heated up in the second round with Konkco trying to establish his jab and Menayothin answering with a left uppercut and some jabs of his own. As the rounds went by, Menayothin let his hands go, attacking in bursts with combinations. Several hard left hooks

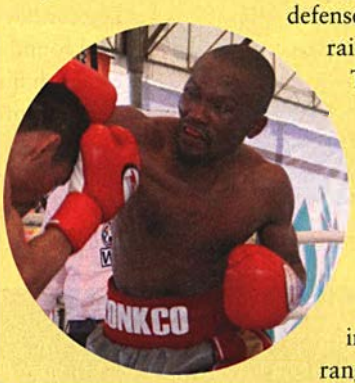
ETHAN MILLER

Romero Duno's confidence was high before going to battle with Ryan Garcia, but he was struck down in the first round.

found their mark in the third, as well as a cracking straight right at the end of the fifth. Konkco rallied at the end of the sixth, trying to change the tide, but the champion controlled the distance well.

Konkco was beginning to have some success in the seventh, landing his jab and straight rights, when a Menayothin right at the bell dropped him for an eight count. The knockdown seemed to light a fire under Konkco, who scored well with body punches and the odd right in the eighth, but he simply couldn't budge Menayothin, who replied with rights of his own.

That set the pattern of the fight. Konkco would land some jabs and power punches to the head and body, but everything he threw was answered by harder, crisper shots from the champion, who even displayed some good use of the jab, a punch that has been largely absent in his previous fights. A double jab followed by a straight right and left uppercut seemed to buzz Konkco in the 10th, and after 12 rounds the decision was a formality.



Simpiwe Konkco was Wanheng Menayothin's 54th straight victim.

Menayothin brought his record to a glossy 54-0 (18 KOs) while Konkco drops to 19-6 (7 KOs).

★★★

After their previous fight in July ended in a draw, light heavyweight Ryno Liebenberg returned to Germany for a rematch against Nick Hannig. Many felt the South African deserved to win their first encounter, and controversy would also plague the rematch with the German prevailing by two scores of 115-112 and a third card of 114-113.

Liebenberg threw the box-and-move tactics he employed in their previous encounter out the window and decided instead to slug it out with his short, stocky opponent, seemingly getting the better of most exchanges in a crowd-pleasing fight. Hannig had his best moment at the end of the sixth round when two short rights hurt the South African, making him stumble momentarily.

With facial damage telling the tale of a grueling fight, both fighters emptied their tanks in the 12th round, battering each other around the ring. A Liebenberg left hook toward the end of the round hurt Hannig badly. Frozen with his back to the ropes, the German was defenseless as Liebenberg rained punches on him. The referee jumped in between them, but instead of stopping the fight gave Hannig a standing eight count, something which was not allowed in the rules. The bell rang as soon as the count was completed, saving Hannig.

Some opined that the South African was robbed again. The scorecards were debatable. But he does have every right to feel that a dramatic last-round stoppage win was taken from him by inept or biased refereeing.

A crowd favorite, Liebenberg has never quite been able to get over the hump at the very top, but Lady Luck has certainly not been on his side, either. He wants one last farewell fight in South Africa before calling it a career.

★★★

It also did not go well for Michael Mokoena when he traveled to Indonesia to take on Duad Yordan in a 12-round junior welterweight bout. After leading on the cards, Mokoena lost by eighth-round TKO when a badly dislocated left shoulder forced him to take a knee, unable to continue.

Yordan is a hard-charging pressure fighter with a very basic, borderline crude style, but he is as strong as an ox and keeps coming. Mokoena employed stick-and-move tactics, staying on his bicycle while peppering Yordan with jabs and straight lefts from his southpaw stance. It was a strategy that clearly frustrated the home fighter.

According to trainer Anton Gilmore, Mokoena's shoulder started popping in and out as early as the fifth round. Yordan, perhaps sensing the distress of his opponent, had a good seventh, finally landing some hard punches after struggling to pin down the South African. He was going after him in the eighth when the shoulder slipped out of its socket for the final time.

Droeks Malan is the South African correspondent for The Ring. You can reach him via Twitter @ droeksonboxing and read his blogs on couchpotatofightguru.blogspot.com.

JAPAN

BY YURIKO MIYATA

The hype around Naoya Inoue grew to fever pitch on November 7, when the Ring bantamweight champion faced Filipino legend Nonito Donaire at Saitama Super Arena in front of a sold-out crowd of 22,000. Three broadcasters retained domestic television rights to the showdown: Fuji TV, the longtime platform contracted with Team Inoue, aired it live; satellite network WOWOW carried it for their subscribers, and NHK, Japan's national public broadcasting organization (which had not aired professional boxing in 57 years) agreed to put the fight on their ultra-high definition channel. Japan's unprecedented TV coverage of Inoue-Donaire is proof that the fight transcended boxing into the general public consciousness.

Inoue fought the fight of his life

under that incredible pressure. Since joining the World Boxing Super Series bantamweight tournament about a year ago, he had eliminated former world titleholder Juan Carlos Payano and reigning IBF 118-pound beltholder Emanuel Rodriguez by vicious knockouts that showed off his speed, hand-eye coordination and devastating power, which increased his popularity worldwide. Versus Donaire, he impressed both diehard fans and the casual public by showing the kind of deep boxing capacity crucial to surviving in top-notch ring wars. During 12 breathtaking rounds against a far more experienced world titleholder who was tremendously motivated and in the best shape of his Hall of Fame career, Inoue was forced to fight through adversity that he'd never previously experienced in the ring.

The first was a nasty cut on his right eyelid produced by slicing left hook from Donaire in Round 2. It wasn't just a bleeding flesh wound, which would need five stitches; the damage included an orbital bone fracture.

Inoue added the WBSS Muhammad Ali trophy to his collection.

"I had double vision after that," Inoue later explained during a follow-up program aired by Fuji TV. "An idea came upon me there. I remembered what Donaire did when facing Rigondeaux." He referred to when Donaire covered his right eye with his glove after being cut by Guillermo Rigondeaux's left hand in the final round of their 2013 fight.

Inoue continued, "I covered my right eye, but I could not keep doing that because it let him know of my vision trouble. So I tried to look OK when I was at a safe distance, and use only my left eye to hit him in the middle range."

He made it. Donaire confessed in a separate interview for that program that he did not realize Inoue was having trouble seeing.

The other critical moment for Inoue came in Round 9. Donaire caught him with a straight right, a key punch for the Filipino throughout the fight. Inoue, who appeared to be tiring out, was clearly shaken.

"It was bad. It hurt me," Inoue admitted. Nobody had ever witnessed Inoue needing to clinch to survive a round prior to this fight. That's how badly he was hurt.

"I've never experienced being hurt like that, but I was ready for the 'what if' this time. Anything could happen, because it was Donaire I was facing. In the gym, I tried to imagine what I should do if I got hurt. If I had not imagined it at all, I would have lost my mind and fought back in a way that could have ruined the fight for myself. But I was still capable, still game. I think I did look sober during most of the trouble."

Inoue's hardest fight proved his mental and physical durability. "When the fight was over, I got emotional, to be honest," he said.

Inoue takes great satisfaction in having gone 12 hard rounds against a future Hall of Famer whom he has admired since he was a boy. The fight also answered questions that some had about Inoue. The Monster is not a mysterious one anymore; he's the real deal, and his popularity in Japan is growing. Inoue's face adorns the covers of major magazines here. And there will be opportunities for fans worldwide to witness him in 2020, as he is going to fight under the Top Rank banner going forward. He speaks only Japanese, but it does not matter, because he is eloquent and compelling in the ring.

★★★

It was in fall 2017 when Inoue debuted in an American ring. A year later, Kazuto Ioka, then a three-division titleholder, signed with Tom Loeffler's 360 Promotions and showed he was ready to win a fourth title in a fourth weight class vs. McWilliams Arroyo at The Forum in Inglewood, California. Who's the next small giant from Japan to take center stage with a U.S. debut? It could be Kosei Tanaka, The Ring's No. 1-ranked flyweight, whose international exposure was expanded by having his most recent WBO title defense (a thrilling seventh-round body-shot KO of Jonathan Gonzalez in August) streamed live on RingTV.com.

The undefeated three-division titleholder visited the U.S. at the end of October and spoke exclusively with The Ring.

"This is my first time visiting America. I just wanted to come here. Being here simply makes me emotional and excited," Tanaka said. He landed in Las Vegas first from his home town Nagoya, then on to Los Angeles. Although he was not really impressed with In-n-Out Burger and other famous American restaurants in Southern California, he fell in love with the vigorous ambiance of the many boxing gyms where young fighters were working hard to be somebody.

"It's good for me to see the spectacular top scene of boxing here and also to see many yet-unknown boxers. I was happy to have four-rounder level boxers willing to spar with me. They were tough. I can imagine how the competition is deep and hard to be one of the top fighters in America. This is the real world of boxing. I have to be ready for any chance to fight here."

Tanaka, who is just 24 years old, has quick, smooth movements and good counterpunching instincts. He's aggressive and merciless if he gets his opponent hurt, but he always remains calm and aware in the ring. Despite his many accomplishments,

Tanaka never shows off after victory, as he always thinks of the loser's pain. That's how he was brought up by his father, Hitoshi, his chief trainer and master in judo, karate and arm wrestling.

"I told him to see things and be composed in any circumstances since he was little. I let him do his best always," Hitoshi said. Even when Tanaka suffered from osteochondritis deformans juvenilis, a debilitating disorder of the femur, which caused walking difficulty at the age of 6, his father (who got through the same disease) did not spoil his son or allow him to miss a karate lesson.

When Tanaka turned professional in November 2013 at the age of 18 with four national amateur titles under his belt, his first notable accomplishment was to become a world titleholder in just five pro bouts, Japan's record.He achieved it when he won the vacant WBO strawweight belt by defeating Julian Yedras of Mexico in May 2015.

"It was the only thing that I wanted to do," Tanaka said. "Since then, I've just done my job, fight by fight, facing whoever was in front of me."

So, when he snatched the WBO flyweight title from the popular Sho Kimura via 12-round decision in a brutal slugfest, Tanaka was not really happy to equal Vasiliy Lomachenko's record of winning titles in three weight divisions in 12 pro fights.

"I've never thought that my record or the numbers prove my true ability. I feel I am still vulnerable," Tanaka said. He's not satisfied with his performance in those recent fights and is checking and reconstructing his boxing fundamentals and technique.

"Positioning, balance and where to put my hands – something like those basic things. I keep them in mind when I practice. I need to have a solid base to develop further tactics to survive against harder competitors."

His next defense, against Wulan Tuolehazi of China, is the co-main event with Kazuto Ioka's WBO 115-pound title defense on New Year's Eve in Tokyo. This will likely be Tanaka's final battle at flyweight; he plans to move up to the 115-pound division sometime in 2020 and hopes to challenge for a title within the year.

Kosei Tanaka isn't letting his accomplishments go to his head.

"I would like to fight any top fighter there," Tanaka said. "I'm training myself hard to be confident of taking part in that tough division."

Yuriko Miyata has covered the Japanese boxing scene for more than 20 years.

CANADA

BY JAMIE REBNER

Eleider "Storm" Alvarez (24-1, 12 KOs) is finally set to get back into the ring, with his recently finalized bout against Michael "Cannon Handz" Seals (24-2, 18 KOs) to headline an ESPN show on January 18 in Verona, New York. Alvarez was a rising star in the light heavyweight division after defeating Montreal stalwarts Lucian Bute and Jean Pascal in 2017. That set up a WBO title fight against Sergey Kovalev, in which Alvarez pulled off the upset by seventh-round knockout. However, in the immediate rematch six months later, Kovalev outboxed Alvarez and reclaimed the title, handing the Montreal-based Colombian his first loss as a pro.

Seals, a former collegiate football player, is known as a heavy hitter with 18 of his 24 wins coming by knockout. It will be interesting to see how Alvarez responds to his first defeat and a one-year layoff, all while going up against a dangerous opponent. By the sound of it, "Storm" is ready to get back in the ring and remind everyone what he's capable of: "I am looking at January 18 to reboot my career against a strong puncher, Michael Seals, and begin my campaign to once again be on top of the boxing world. I have a lot of respect for my opponent, but in 2020, nothing will stop me from becoming a world champion again."

★★★

Like Alvarez, another top Montreal fighter was set to headline a high-profile card at press time, this one involving Yves Ulysse Jr. (18-1, 9 KOs) taking on veteran Ismael Barroso (21-3-2, 20 KOs) as part of DAZN's Thursday Night Fights series on December 5 in Costa Mesa, California. Ulysse was fighting for just the second time in 2019, after having beaten Canadian rival Steve Claggett in April. That win was especially meaningful for Ulysse because it allowed him to avenge his sole loss from 2017. He got a late start in boxing, having turned pro at the age of 25, but despite being fresh for 31, now is his time to make a push for a world title. To do so, the Montreal native has enlisted the services of Golden Boy Promotions, who has been working in tandem with Eye of the Tiger Management to get him the biggest fights and increase his exposure in the U.S.

★★★

On November 16, at the CAA Centre in Brampton, Ontario, United Boxing Promotions staged a card featuring some of Ontario's top talent. In the main event, Brandon "Bad Boy" Cook returned to the

ring after a 14-month injury-related layoff and stopped Jose Luis Zuniga (16-6-1, 9 KOs) in the first round thanks to a potent right hand. Cook's previous bout was a world title bid against Jaime Munguia, which the Canadian lost via third-round TKO. At 33, Cook is looking to make one more title run and took a pivotal step forward with his win in Brampton. Another first-round finish came courtesy of middleweight prospect Sukhdeep Singh, who improved to 7-0 (3 KOs) in stopping Hector Santana (26-10, 20 KOs). Also competing was lightweight Josh O'Reilly (16-0, 6 KOs), who remained undefeated with a sixth-round body-shot stoppage of journeyman Cecilio Santos (36-35-6, 21 KOs). Additional victors on the undercard were Canadians Ryan Young (14-4, 11 KOs), Brock Stumpf (3-0, 3 KOs), Mark Smither (3-0), and Mponda Kalunga (7-2, 3 KOs).

★★★

In sad news, Kevin McDermott, a highly regarded and respected head coach of the Calgary Boxing Club for 40 years, passed away on October 31 after a long battle with cancer. McDermott was born in 1955 in Detroit, moved to the U.K. at a young age with his family and then relocated to Windsor, Ontario, as a teenager. At 19, he moved to Calgary, which is where he would spend the majority of his life. According to his obituary in the Calgary Herald, "Kevin had the heart of a champion. He was a gentleman, principled and fiercely loyal, kind, generous and, above all, devoted to his family."

As a boxer, Kevin was quite successful; his most notable achievement was winning a bronze medal at the 1982 Commonwealth Games in Australia. But his greatest accomplishments were as a head coach, with several of his pupils excelling for Canada on the international stage. Two of his athletes, Willie DeWitt and Billy Dunlop, competed in the 1984 Olympics, where DeWitt would claim a silver medal after losing to Henry Tillman in the final. But Kevin proved that his success as a coach was far from an anomaly, as several other of his pupils competed in other Games, including Brent Kosolofski in 1988 and Dale Brown in 1992. McDermott was also in Brown's corner during the last of his three unsuccessful world-title challenges, which came against O'Neil Bell in 2005. Brown lost a unanimous decision in a very competitive fight, a result that the ESPN broadcast team vehemently disagreed with and felt that Brown had won.

Terry Coveney is the president of the Calgary Boxing Club and was one of its founding members. He was friends with Kevin for many years, dating back to their time as boxers climbing through the amateur ranks.

"We were much more than coaches; we were best friends," said Terry. "Our friendship has grown over the 40 years; he's like a second father to my kids. We didn't always have good times and the money we have today. During those lean times, we lived together; when he needed a place to live, he lived with my family, and vice-versa. The things I'll remember about Kev is his work ethic and commitment to the tradition of boxing. He never did anything to give a black eye to boxing; he loved the sport and he treated it like he loved it. What I admired most about him were his honesty and his dedication; nobody was more dedicated than Kev when it came to boxing, and he was at his best when he was around the sport."

It's also important to remember that Kevin wasn't just a trainer of the country's top boxers; he was just as invested in the countless young boys and girls that he trained regardless of their ambition as fighters. Kevin was an amazing mentor and leader in his community, and he will be sorely missed by the many lives that he touched. But rest assured that thanks to the indispensable knowledge he passed on to the many fighters and coaches he worked with, the Calgary Boxing Club is in great hands. RING

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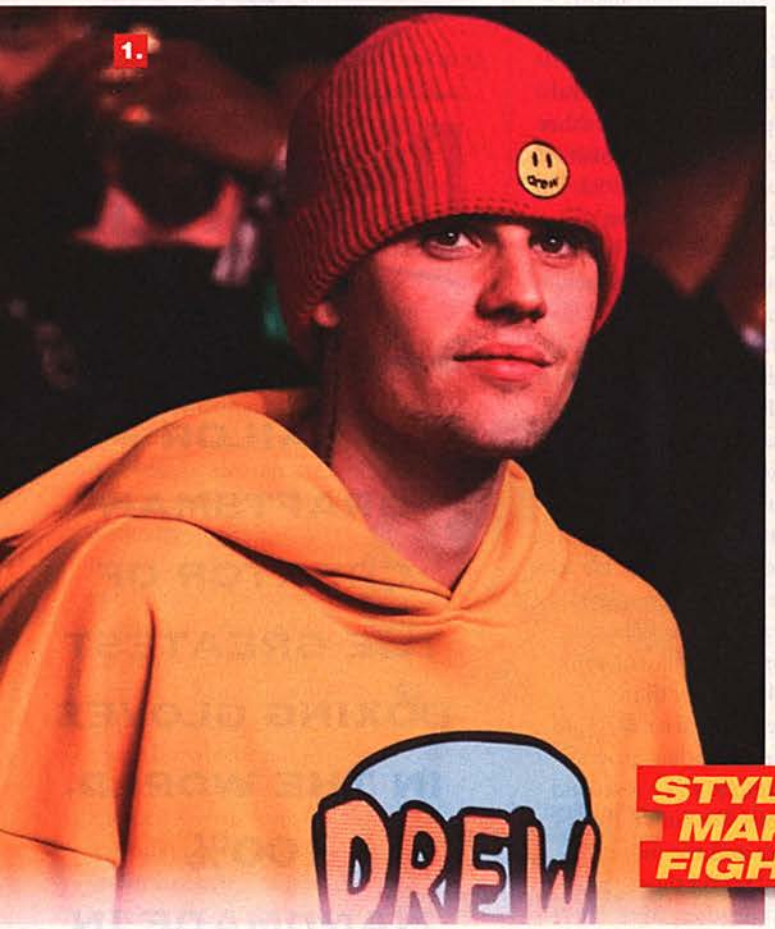
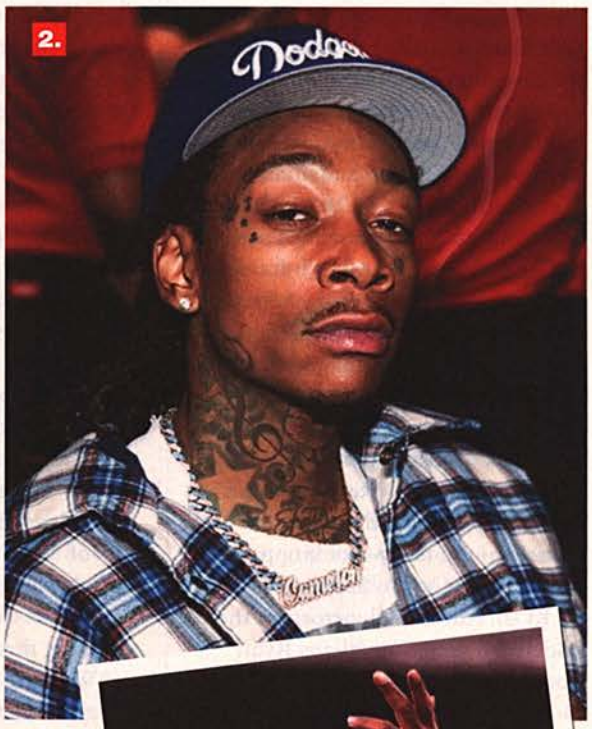
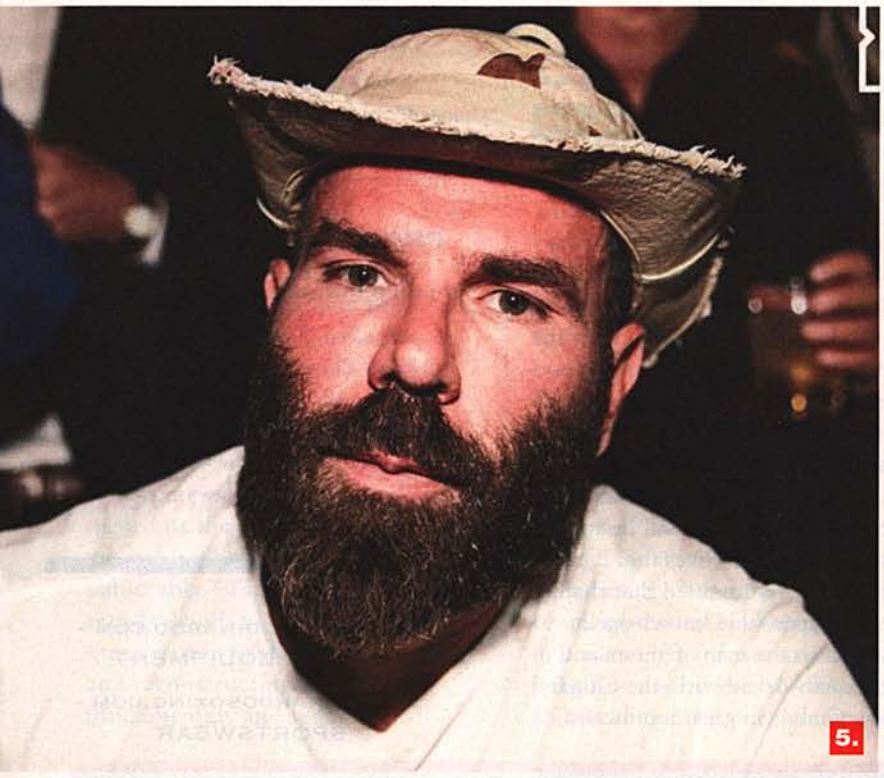




STYLES MAKE FIGHTS

At The Fights for KSI vs. Logan Paul 2 (Staples Center, Los Angeles): 1. Justin Bieber 2. Wiz Khalifa 3. Rick Ross; and for Canelo vs. Kovalev (MGM Grand, Las Vegas): 4. Charles Barkley 5. Dan Bilzerian.



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HITMAN HIGH

Thomas Hearns had built his reputation as a devastating puncher at welterweight and junior middleweight, picking up titles in both divisions and leaving a trail of knockout victims in his wake. In 1985, the Detroit-based superstar came unstuck in an attempt at the middleweight championship, when he was stopped in three rounds by Marvelous Marvin Hagler in one of the greatest fights of all time. Determined to bounce back in style, Hearns made the audacious leap to 175 pounds in a bid to challenge WBC light heavyweight titleholder Dennis Andries. The naturally lighter man reportedly stuffed his pockets with coins to make an artificial 173 pounds at the weigh-in, but his class was more than enough on fight night. The bout took place at the Cobo Hall in Detroit on March 7, 1987, and Hearns decked the crazy-brave Andries six times en route to an emphatic 10th-round stoppage.

COMING UP

Baltimore native Gervonta Davis (left) has considerable career momentum going into his lightweight bout against former featherweight titleholder Yuriorkis Gamboa.

DECEMBER

DEC. 23 – Ryota Murata vs. Steven Butler, middleweights, Yokohama, Japan (ESPN+). Also, Ken Shiro vs. Randy Petalcorin, junior flyweights (for Shiro's WBC title); Moruti Mthalane vs. Akira Yaegashi, flyweights (for Mthalane's IBF title).

DEC. 28 – Gervonta Davis vs. Yuriorkis Gamboa, lightweights, Atlanta (Showtime). Also, Jean Pascal vs. Badou Jack, light heavyweights.

DEC. 31 – Kosei Tanaka vs. Wulan Tuolehazi, flyweights (for Tanaka's WBO title), Yokohama, Japan. Also, Kazuto Ioka vs. Jeyvier Cintron, junior bantamweights (for Ioka's WBO title).

JANUARY

JAN. 10 – Claressa Shields vs. Ivana Habazin, junior middleweights (for vacant WBC/WBO titles), Atlantic City (Showtime).

JAN. 11 – Jaime Munguia vs. Gary O'Sullivan, middleweights, San Antonio, Texas (DAZN).

JAN. 11 – Jesse Hart vs. Joe Smith Jr., light heavyweights, Atlantic City (ESPN).

JAN. 18 – Eleider Alvarez vs. Michael Seals, light heavyweights, Verona, New York (ESPN+).

JAN. 18 – Julian Williams vs. Jeison Rosario, junior middleweights (for Williams' IBF/WBA titles), Philadelphia (Fox).

FEBRUARY

FEB. 1 – Jose Ramirez vs. Viktor Postol, junior welterweights (for Ramirez's WBC/WBO titles), Haikou, China (ESPN).

FEB. 22 – Deontay Wilder vs. Tyson Fury, heavyweights (for Wilder's WBC title), TBA (ESPN-Fox PPV).

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